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HOW THE STUDIO CREATED ITS HUGE NEW ATARI COLLECTION

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THE PERFECT GIFT, EVERY TIME

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ATARI GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I, Robot, *Missile Command* and *Tempest*, so anything touched by Dave Theurer. What a genius.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful daughters and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Cathedral*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Super Sprint was really good fun in the arcades –spinning those massive wheels.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Return To Monkey Island*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

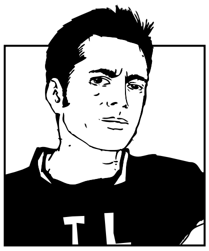
It has to be *Warlords*. Get four players together and it's carnage, and I'd happily put it up against any more modern multiplayer game in a heartbeat.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Gears Of War*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

One of the earliest games I remember playing in the arcade is *Battlezone*, it was well ahead of its time.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now.

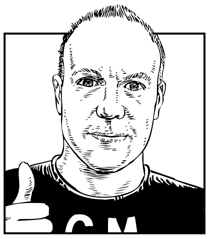
PAUL DRURY

Being told to pick one Atari game is like being asked to choose a favourite child – I love so many of its coin-ops from the golden age of arcades but if forced, I will have to choose the beautiful and timeless *Asteroids*.
Expertise: Nolan's hot tub
Currently playing: *Overboard!*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*



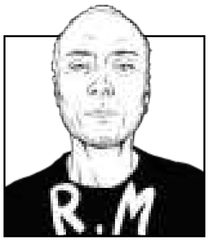
IAIN LEE

Permission to be vaguely controversial. I had more fun playing the Atari version of *Pac-Man* than I did any other Atari game. I was about nine. I didn't know it was no good and an awful port. Many, many happy hours.
Expertise: Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing: *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare II*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)



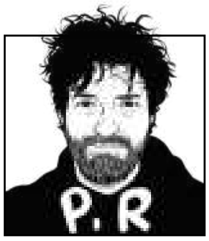
GRAEME MASON

I love the beautiful simplicity of *Asteroids*, and it still looks super cool even today.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Bioshock Infinite*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*



RORY MILNE

The first game I ever played was *Tempest*. Even though I was barely tall enough to see the screen it absolutely blew my mind. Decades later it's still my favourite.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Turrican*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*



PAUL ROSE

I'm going really old-school and saying *Combat*, as the first Atari game I remember playing. The noise when you died was brutal!
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *The Otherside*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

LOADING...

Many would agree that gaming wouldn't be what it is today without Atari. Founded in 1972 as Atari Inc by Nolan Bushnell and the late Ted Dabney, Atari was the beginning of an industry, an industry that has since grown to gargantuan proportions.

Early successes like *Pong* and the Atari VCS, along with a number of incredible arcade games and that instantly iconic logo, has helped the memory of Atari burn bright and while it's a new company and under new ownership, it remains one of the most recognisable names in all of gaming.

What a treat then to not only chart the highs and lows of Atari's fascinating 50-year history, but to also give you a visual representation as well in the form of this year's calendar, which highlights some of Atari's most iconic and innovative games, from *Adventure* and *Missile Command* to *I, Robot* and *Tempest 2000*.

Other highlights of issue 240 include an interview with Stephen Frost and other Digital Eclipse members about the creation of *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*, the history behind Crystal Dynamics' *Legacy Of Kain* series and why *RoboCop* was such a huge hit on the ZX Spectrum.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

retro GAMER
50 years of ATARI

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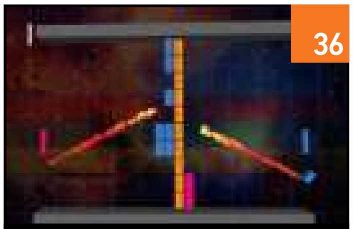

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Acquire's back catalogue is varied and interesting. Its president, Takuma Endo talks us through the highlights

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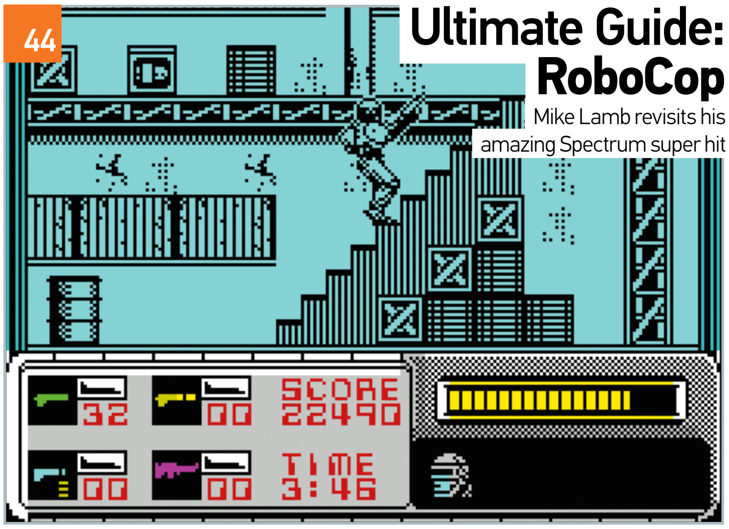
50 Years Of Atari
Atari staff past and present look back at the highs and lows that defined the iconic trailblazing videogame publisher



Ultimate Guide: RoboCop
Mike Lamb revisits his amazing Spectrum super hit

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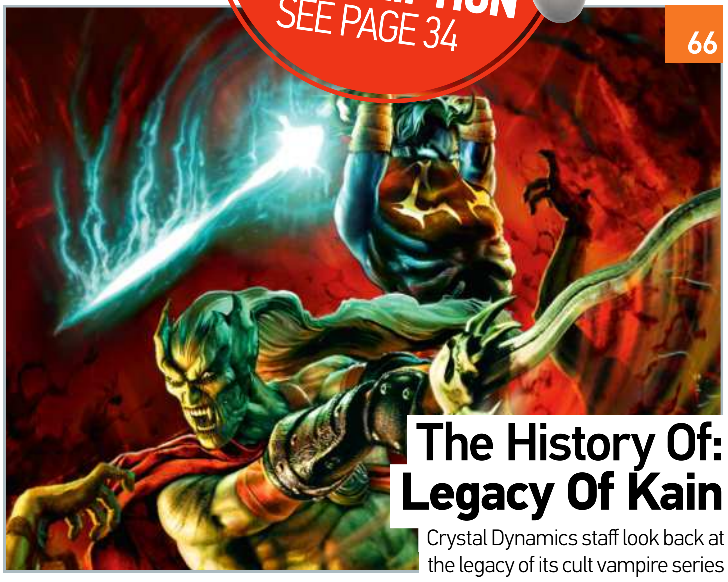
Studio Profile: Gog.com

Discover how piracy led to the Polish publisher preserving gaming history



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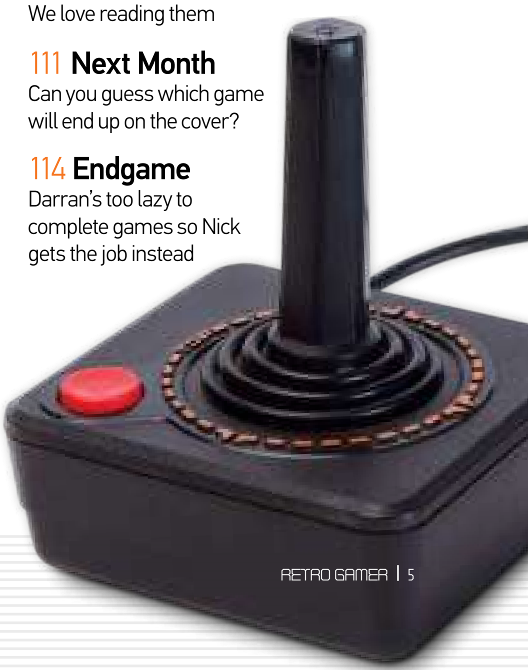

» [3DS] The series isn't well-known here, but *7th Dragon* is a big deal in Japan and *7th Dragon III Code: VFD* is the most-recent game.

» Rieko Kodama first started work at Sega in 1984 and was involved with titles like *Phantasy Star* and *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

IN MEMORY OF REIKO KODAMA

Tributes flood in for a Sega legend

★ CONTENTS

6 IN MEMORY OF RIEKO KODAMA
We pay tribute to the pixel artist who brought Alex Kidd and Sonic The Hedgehog to life

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All Iain ever wanted to do was play *Daredevil Dennis* online, but did it ever happen?

10 MR BIFFO
Paul recalls the effect the PlayStation had on gaming

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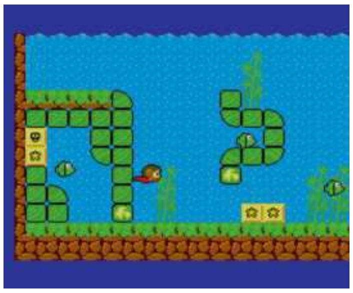
We go behind the scenes of *Arcade Paradise*, which combines running an arcade with working in a busy laundrette

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick continues his exciting adventures through gaming's past. This month he's found himself in March 2006.

When Nick was putting together his review for the Mega Drive Mini 2 the last thing he was expecting to find was an obituary for Rieko Kodama. Nevertheless, that's exactly what he discovered when he viewed the staff credits for the recently released system.

His discovery was soon picked up online by various game websites and the sad news was quickly confirmed by Sega producer Yosuke Okunari who went on to tweet, "We respected her." Kodama, who was also known as Phoenix Rie, actually passed away back on 9 May at the age of 59, but Sega chose not to say anything at the time as a mark of respect to her family.



» [Master System] *Alex Kidd* is one of the first games that would have introduced gamers to Kodama's work as it was a pack-in for Sega's Master System.

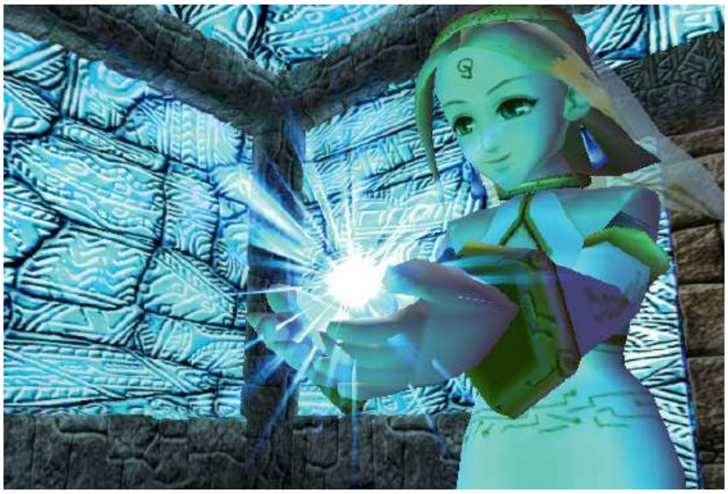
Many members of Sega, past and present, soon began to tweet about Kodama's passing, with some of the most touching coming from Yuji Naka, who not only shared pictures of Kodama's funeral, but shared the following sentiment. "It has finally been announced that Rieko Kodama has passed away. I have fond memories of working with her on *Phantasy Star* and *Sonic*. I went to the wake and funeral and could not believe how sudden it was. I pray for your soul. Rest in peace." Hirokazu Yashuhara who also worked alongside Kodama on *Sonic The Hedgehog* said, "Yes, I still can't believe it, it's so sad. I am proud to have worked with you, Kodama-san."

Widely recognised as one of the most successful women in the videogame industry, Rieko Kodama first started her career at Sega as a graphic designer where she initially worked on SG-1000 games like *Champion Boxing* and *Sega Ninja*. She soon graduated to working on games for the Mega Drive and Master System, and once went into great detail about the strengths of the Mega Drive in issue 182 of this magazine. Being a highly accomplished pixel artist meant Kodama was adept at pushing systems to their limits in order to get the best out of them. In addition to games like *Sonic The Hedgehog* and its sequel her fantastic sprite design is perhaps best exemplified with *Phantasy Star* and the excellent *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*, which ended up being a pack-in game for Sega's Master System.

It would appear that simply working as an artist wasn't enough for the talented Kodama and she quickly rose through the ranks at Sega, directing two big RPG projects in the process. The first was *Phantasy Star IV: The End Of The Millennium*, which actually takes place 1,000 years after the events of *Phantasy Star II* and 1,000 years before *Phantasy Star III*, concluding the story of the Algol Star System. It introduced numerous new features to the popular series, including gorgeous manga-style panel illustrations and has gone on to receive numerous re-releases.

Kodama's second directorial outing was *Magic Knight*

Rayearth, an action-focussed RPG based on the popular manga and anime series of the same name. Sadly, the game never made it to Europe, although it has the somewhat dubious honour of being the last game released officially on the Saturn in America. NecroSoft Games' Brandon Sheffield had much praise for both Kodama's game and Kodama herself going on to say, "When we talk about something 'feeling like a Sega game' to me Kodama is a big part of that. She pushed for different experiences, pushed for games starring women, pushed for bright colours – but never got boxed into making games for a specific demographic. Kodama was, and remains, a legend of game development – we lost a unique voice with her passing."


» [Dreamcast] *Skies Of Arcadia* was one of several big-name titles that Kodama went on to produce.

Although she only directed two games, Kodama continued to find great acclaim at Sega and also moved into producing roles where she built up an exceptional list of credits that ranged from the Saturn survival horror game *Deep Fear* to the critically acclaimed *Skies Of Arcadia* for Sega's Dreamcast. The Dreamcast RPG is a particular fan-favourite and while a sequel never arrived, Kodama did return to the beloved RPG in 2002 with *Skies Of Arcadia Legends* for GameCube, essentially a director's cut to the Dreamcast original, which added numerous extras and made random enemy encounters far less prolific.

Other producing roles included her work on the popular *7th Dragon* series, which began life on Nintendo's DS and received sequels on PSP and 3DS and the disappointing *Project Altered Beast*, the last entry in the *Altered Beast* series. More recently at Sega she was involved with M2's popular Sega Ages range, a selection of classic Sega arcade games for Nintendo's Switch.

Rieko Kodama's contributions to both Sega and gaming in general have started to gain more recognition in recent years and she received the Pioneer Award at the 2018 Game Developers Choice Award, which was held in March 2019. She leaves behind an impressive, enduring legacy that includes some of Sega's best-loved games. Our thoughts go out to her friends and family. *

BL. DRAGN
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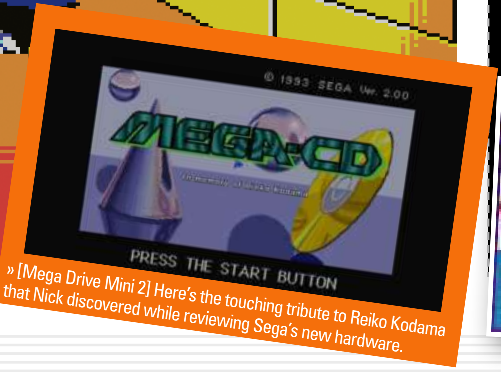
» [Master System] *Phantasy Star* was another popular series that Kodama worked on. She'd eventually direct the fourth game in the series.



» [Mega Drive Mini 2] Here's the touching tribute to Reiko Kodama that Nick discovered while reviewing Sega's new hardware.

RETURN TO SILENT HILL

Typical. You wait absolutely ages for a new *Silent Hill* game, then four are announced at once. Konami used an online event called Silent Hill Transmission to address the rumours that have been circulating since earlier this year. Four new games are currently in development, including *Silent Hill: Townside*, a remake of *Silent Hill 2*, an online experience called *Silent Hill: Ascension* and *Silent Hill F*, which is set in feudal Japan. A new movie is also on the way courtesy of Christophe Gans.

NEW EXPO HEADS TO NOTTINGHAM

If you're looking for a new gaming event to attend, you may want to consider visiting the Nottingham Video Game Expo, which takes place 17 and 18 December. The event will be hosted by the popular podcast The Retro Hour and is sponsored by *Sega Powered* magazine. Numerous guests from Rare to WAVE Game Studios and The Dreamcast Junkyard will be in attendance, while Get Well Gamers is the expo's charity partner. You can get more news at nottsvge.com/home

NOTTINGHAM VIDEO GAMES EXPO
WAVE
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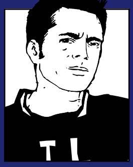
Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Hello, is anybody there?



From about the age of ten (1983/84) I wanted to play games online. Of course we didn't have the vocabulary then to express it like that. I just wanted to play *Dare Devil Dennis* with my mates while I was in my house, and they were in theirs. I'd seen some TV show, probably Micro Live, that had given me my first glimpse of the information superhighway. Prestel was the old-fashioned internet run by the Post Office. Nuts, right?

On the show, the hosts throw to a couple in their living room who explained how easy it was to get online. All you had to do was plonk the handset of your house telephone into a giant acoustic coupler and wait about 20 minutes. This blew my mind. There were message boards, news and travel. Basically it was Ceefax but with a tiny bit more interaction.

One of my friends at school lied to me and told me that despite not having an acoustic coupler, they had stumbled onto Prestel via their BBC Micro. I fell for this and that evening set up my BBC next to the phone extension. I was there for two hours typing things like 'HELLO' and 'IS ANYONE THERE?'. The amazing thing is someone replied!

Obviously that's a lie but I feel sorry for young me doing that and always wince a bit sharing that story. I was a nerd and a not very clever one at that. Fast forward 18 years or so and my dream finally came true with the release of the Dreamcast. *Chu Chu Rocket* and *Phantasy Star Online* were exactly what I was after. I couldn't imagine it would get any better. Then *Moto GP* on the Xbox arrived and you could actually talk to other competitors. Amazing.

Obviously chatting via headsets is problematic. A few years ago, you would constantly be spammed with racist language and all kinds of phobic stuff. It feels like it has got better recently, but you still have to tread carefully. This is a nightmare for a dad of two boys aged 10 and 12. When they're online I'm always asking, "Who are you talking to? How old are they?"

Like everything that was once amazing, I take talking online whilst playing games for granted. Sometimes I need to remind myself how wonderful technology is and how life enriching it can be. Right, next *Call Of Duty* session, I'm gonna make some friends online. After all, a stranger is just a friend you haven't met yet.

Actually, that sounds really weird and I will definitely not be doing that. *

> "Basically it was Ceefax but with a tiny bit more interaction"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Gaming goes mainstream

As I write this, I've just finished watching the Netflix adaptation of the 1994 young-adult novel *The Midnight Club*. Set in the year the book was released, the show is about a bunch of terminally ill teenagers who live in a creepy hospice, and meet up every night to tell ghost stories.

One of those characters is something of a gamer and would-be games designer, who is, inevitably, a sort of socially awkward virgin. Putting aside the inevitability of this cliché, I did find it interesting that the show does a relatively good job of leaning into where gaming was in 1994. There are mentions of the Atari 7800, the N64 and the Mega-CD (this being a US series, it's called the Sega CD instead). That aspect, at least, rang true of the writers – even if they did fall back on hoary old tropes.

What really leapt out though was how excited the character was for the imminent release of the original PlayStation. They even feature him receiving a Japanese model on import, because he wasn't expected to live long enough to see the official release. It was a nice detail, but it reminded me of that time, and just what a paradigm shift in the industry the release of the PlayStation was.

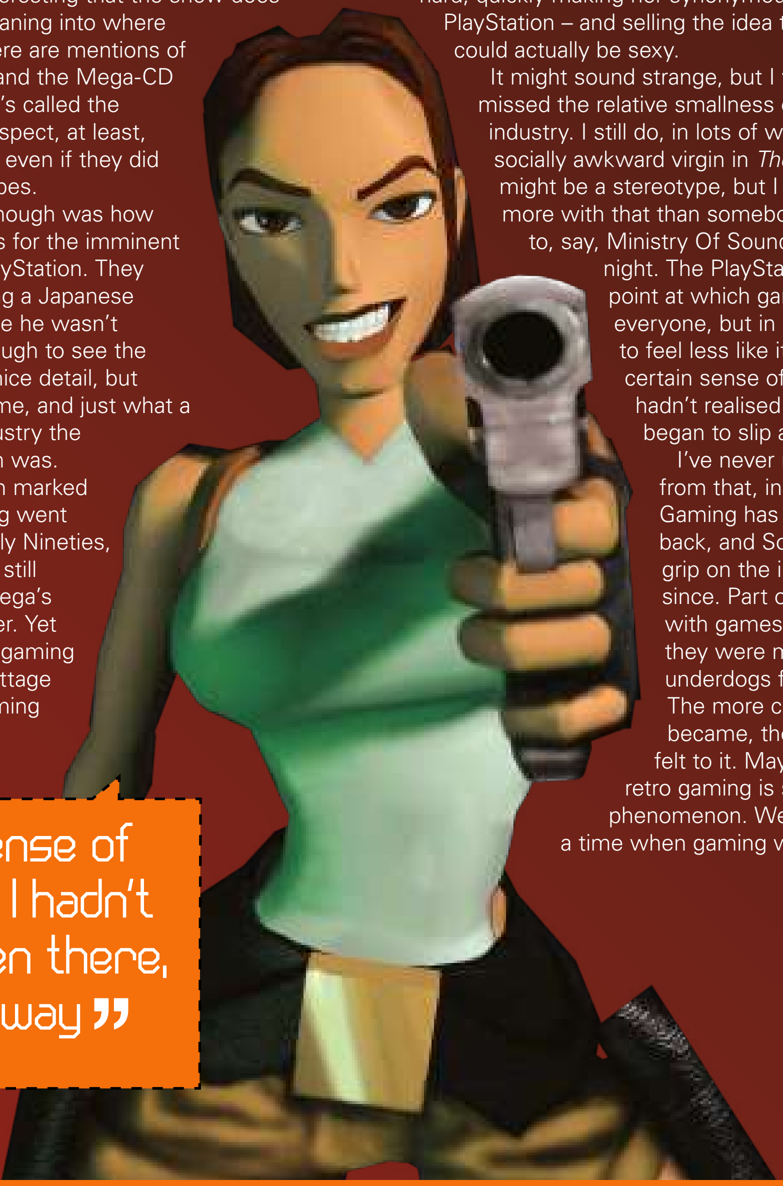
For me, the PlayStation marked the point at which gaming went corporate. Yes, in the early Nineties, Sega and Nintendo were still enormous – albeit with Sega's flame beginning to sputter. Yet somehow it still felt as if gaming was a sort of massive cottage industry. It was ours; gaming belonged to the gamers.

When the PlayStation released, gaming quickly became something more. The doors opened, and the rest of the world rushed in waving glowsticks and blowing whistles. Specifically, a cooler crowd, sold on the notion of the PlayStation as a lifestyle brand as much as a console.

It was incredibly canny marketing on Sony's part, to sell the PlayStation as something socially acceptable. It's telling that the first pack-in game featured the player driving around in a flashy sports car, rather than controlling a cartoon hedgehog or plumber. Sony pushed Lara Croft hard, quickly making her synonymous with the PlayStation – and selling the idea that gaming could actually be sexy.

It might sound strange, but I very quickly missed the relative smallness of the games industry. I still do, in lots of ways. Yes, the socially awkward virgin in *The Midnight Club* might be a stereotype, but I always identified more with that than somebody who went to, say, Ministry Of Sound on a Saturday night. The PlayStation was the point at which gaming became for everyone, but in doing so it started to feel less like it was just mine. A certain sense of ownership, that I hadn't realised was even there, began to slip away.

I've never really recovered from that, in some respects. Gaming has never looked back, and Sony has kept its grip on the industry ever since. Part of why I fell in love with games was because they were made by the underdogs for the underdogs. The more corporate gaming became, the less connected I felt to it. Maybe that's why retro gaming is such a phenomenon. We're trying to recall a time when gaming was for us. *



> "A certain sense of ownership, that I hadn't realised was even there, began to slip away"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

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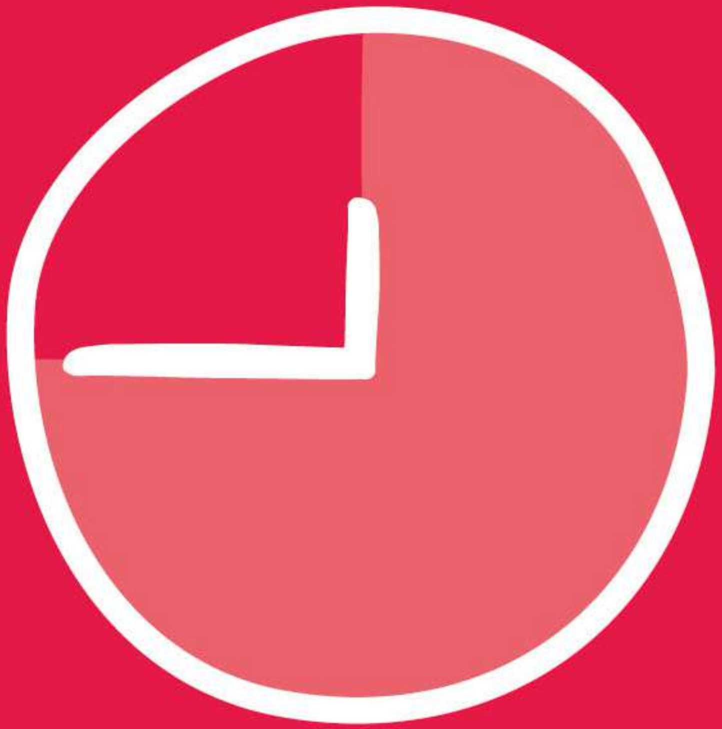

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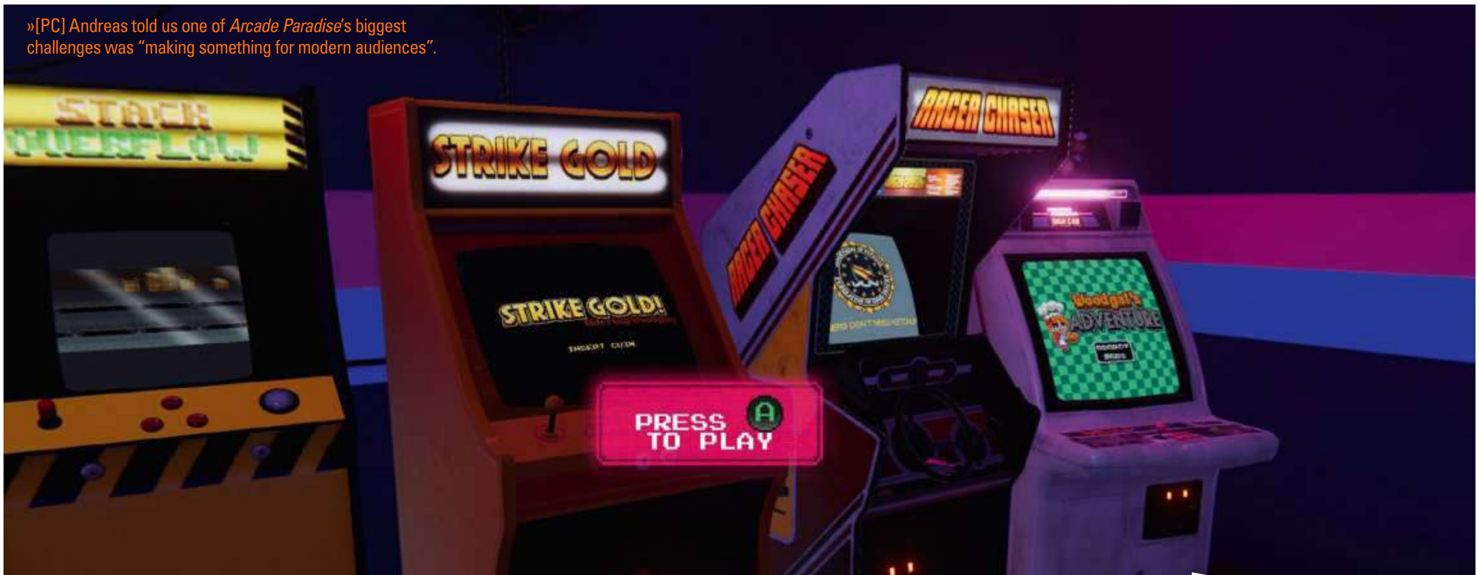

»[PC] Andreas told us one of *Arcade Paradise*'s biggest challenges was "making something for modern audiences".

» Andreas Firnigl is CEO of Nosebleed Interactive and has big plans for *Arcade Paradise*.

Arcade Paradise

Andreas Firnigl on combining arcade gaming with laundry

You wouldn't think that a combination of running a launderette and managing a growing arcade business would be a recipe for success, but Nosebleed Interactive's *Arcade Paradise* proves otherwise. Nosebleed's CEO and founder Andreas Firnigl explains how the unlikely pairing came to be.

Where did the idea for *Arcade Paradise* come from?

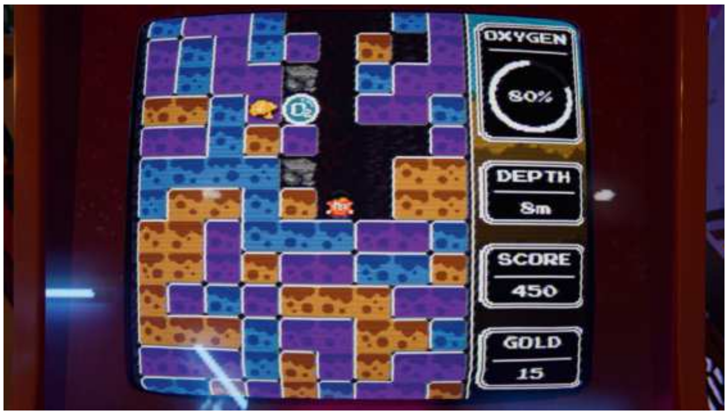
Originally we were pitching a racing/RPG hybrid. A CARPG if you will. Because it was a game full of loot and other stuff, we had a bunch of unlockable games in it. I was showing our prototype to [Wired Production's] CEO. They'd just released a racing game so couldn't really sign it, but they really liked it, especially the arcade games you could unlock. "Why don't you just do these?" I was asked. "Will you sign it?" was my reply. "Hell yeah!" was the answer. That's really the genesis of *Arcade Paradise*.

Why use a launderette as the game's setting?

As a teen growing up in the Nineties I had my fair share of really terrible jobs. I think being stuck in a job you don't really enjoy is something a lot of people can relate to, or maybe have memories of. Originally we toyed with the idea of setting it in the back of a VHS rental place (just like the first grotty little arcade I ever went to), but for a teen in the Nineties, working in a video shop was quite an aspirational cool job. Washing people's undies, less so.

We found that the laundry-running aspect initially feels a little overwhelming. How hard have both parts of the game been to balance?

If there's one part of the game I'd want to revisit it's the early game signposting. We only make it clear to the player about a quarter of the way in, that they will make much more money playing the arcade games themselves than doing laundry. In reality players are completely free to choose how to play and can ignore laundry from day one and make much faster progress, (it's always been balanced like that) but narratively it's important that they get to a point where they naturally abandon that part of the game in favour of the arcade. Everyone comes to this realisation at different points, and so it feels natural, but maybe we could


» [PC] Andreas wanted the minigames to be "games you could conceivably buy as standalone products".

steer them in that direction a little earlier and a little more explicitly.

What technical challenges have you faced while working on *Arcade Paradise*?

We're a really small team and *Arcade Paradise* is a really big game. Making one game comes with its own challenges so making more than 35 that all interlink with a larger and pretty complex metagame was a really big undertaking. With us creating so much content we really had to decide where to spend additional effort and where we didn't need to put as much. The arcade games are the stars of *Arcade Paradise*, so we really spent a long time making sure each one felt faithful to the era, but played in a manner that's friendly to modern audiences. I think we've managed to strike that balance well.

What gameplay-focussed challenges have you had to tackle?

Again, the sheer size of the game meant that it was inherently a challenge to make. We really wanted to surprise players with the breadth and the depth on offer so making sure each of the arcade games was up to scratch was super important, but also making sure the pace and amount of content unlocking was right. We want players to get something new every 15-30 minutes. I think we achieved this pretty well but there are areas we've already rebalanced following feedback, for example the player upgrades have all been reduced in cost since launch.

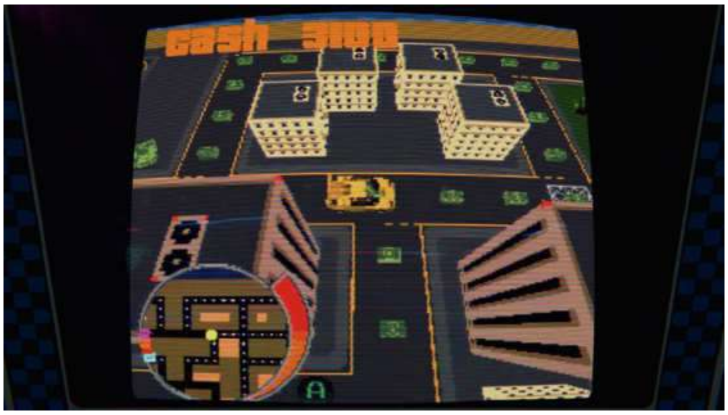
> "We were always conscious to try and add something new"
>
> **ANDREAS FIRNIGL**

PocketPauser 3
To Do
Accounts
Links
Upgrades
Settings
Arcade Management

» [PC] More games will be added to *Arcade Paradise* with Andreas telling us, "It's a no-brainer that we'll be adding more content."

Arcade Paradise excels at feeling like the Nineties. How much research went into capturing that era?

Not much if I'm honest. I think part of the reason it feels kind of authentic is because a lot of it is based on hazy memory and real experience rather than extensive research. It was really important to us to capture that feeling. Obviously some of the younger members of the team don't have any memory of the era so there was some steering required there and gathering of reference material, but what worked well was, those who remember the Nineties, going through all the references and making sure it was right.



» [PC] Games like Racer Chaser needed prompts to help players.

» [PC] Andreas says, "I wasn't expecting how much players would enjoy the washing aspects."

» [PC] Even mundane tasks like emptying bins have been turned into engaging minigames.

Some of the included games feel very obvious in their inspirations. Were there any concerns that some might be a little too close to their source material?

We were always conscious to try and add something new to everything we did. Either new mechanics, or a completely different graphical style or something that set it apart in our own make believe universe. If I'm being honest with myself, there are one or two entries that are really close, but a lot of that is reverence for the source. Try as you might, it's not possible to improve on perfection, so in one or two instances we try really hard to pay tribute. I absolutely loved *Puzzle Bobble 2* for example. It's a game that's inspired a billion copycats who never acknowledge the source. I'd like to think we do, in the most humble way. *

***Arcade Paradise* is on sale now and is available on PC as well as all contemporary consoles.**

VIDEO GAME HALL

» [PC] Pinball tables should be on the way with Andreas admitting they are "one of the most-requested game types".

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MARCH 2006 – While it might be a slow month for games, Nintendo has caught everyone by surprise with an unexpected revision of its hot new handheld. Once again, Nick Thorpe travels through time to bring you yesterday's hottest news

NEWS MARCH 2006

Former politician John Profumo passed away at the age of 91 on 9 March. He was best-known for the scandal around his affair with Christine Keeler, a model and alleged national security risk due to her concurrent relationship with Soviet naval attaché Yevgeny Ivanov. Profumo resigned as an MP after having lied to the House Of Commons about the affair, and devoted the rest of his working life to voluntary charity fund-raising.

On 11 March, Slobodan Milosevic was found dead in his prison cell at The Hague. The former Yugoslavian president was on trial for war crimes in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo, including charges of genocide. He had died of a heart attack, with both supporters and opponents claiming it had been induced deliberately.

This month saw the emergence of the cash-for-honours scandal in UK politics, in which a number of men who were nominated for life peerages were found to have made large loans to the Labour Party. Unlike regular cash donations, loans on commercial terms did not have to be reported to the public. Though no charges were ever brought, Tony Blair became the first serving prime minister to be questioned by police during a criminal investigation.

» Stacks of DS Lite consoles in Japan, waiting to be handed to eager new owners.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 2006

With the gaming world gearing up for the release of major home consoles, this month contained a small surprise in the form of a handheld debut, with the new Nintendo DS Lite going on sale in Japan. The new model was both smaller and lighter than the original DS, with improved screens that offered additional backlight brightness levels, and a new look inspired by Apple's iPod designs. It might seem a strange move with the original model still under 18 months old, but Nintendo was keen to capitalise on the success of the format, with *Edge* noting that "the handheld accounted for nearly 45 percent of all software sold in Japan last year". The magazine also reported that "the most common response to Lite so far is from keen gamers who are happy to contemplate passing on their old DS to a girlfriend or sibling in order to make the switch".

TRAM
getting up

» [PS2] *GamesMaster* claimed to have never seen a graffiti game before, apparently forgetting *Jet Set Radio*.

Speaking of new machines, there wasn't much out for the Xbox 360 this month but the quality of *Dead Or Alive 4* made up for the lack of quantity. According to the *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, Tecmo's fighting sequel "shows off just how much detail it's possible to cram into impossibly elaborate stages" and was an "enjoyable, solid, beautiful game" worth 9/10. *GamesMaster* gave it 85% and *360* gave it 4/5, but the latter cautioned that some players "will simply be put off by the sheer difficulty". The other 360 game of the month was Sega's *Full Auto*, a combat racing game that earned 7/10 from the *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, 67% from *GamesMaster*, 3/5 from *360* and 6/10 from *Edge*, which criticised the emphasis on racing over combat.

Back on the Xbox and PS2, the big game of the month was Criterion's first-person shooter *Black*. *Edge* scored the game 8/10, calling the game "a focused sandbox of gas and gunpowder in which natural law has been supplanted by action movie lore". It also scored 90% in *GamesMaster* and 8.4/10 in *Official Xbox Magazine*, which described it as "the most crazy, fantastical shooter you'll ever experience" but complained of its lack of multiplayer and "short, yet spectacularly sweet" length. More divisive was *Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure*, a genre-blending graffiti adventure. *Official Xbox Magazine* scored the game 8.0/10 and praised its "quirkiness and unpredictability" and *GamesMaster* scored it 85%. *Edge* scored the game 4/10, criticising its simplistic graffiti mechanics and combat.

PC Gamer's cover game, strategy title *Star Wars: Empire At War*, earned 79%. The review claimed that it was "hard not to think" that it would get 10% less without the licence, as space battles were judged to be initially exciting but eventually unchallenging, while land battles were considered "uninspiring". *PC Gamer* did like *Commandos: Strike Force*, a "slow paced" and "sneaky" first-person reinvention of the classic 2D series, scoring it 85%. *Official Xbox Magazine* gave it 8.6/10, as it delivered "on the promise of giving you multiple ways to complete each mission" and *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* gave it 7/10, feeling it inferior to *Call Of Duty 2* and *Black*.

In a cruel reminder that the GameCube was already starting to be considered part of gaming's past, its UK releases were *Namco Museum* (70% *NGC*) and *Pac-Man World 3* (64% *NGC*). Nintendo fans could at least enjoy *Metroid Prime Pinball* on the DS, which *NGC* declared "perfect bite-sized entertainment" in an 82% review. The long-delayed European release of *WarioWare: Twisted!* for the Game Boy Advance was also praised by *NGC*, but its 87% score wasn't enough to actually make the tilt-sensitive cartridge actually appear on shop shelves.

If you picked the PSP instead, the best new game of the month was the puzzle platformer *Exit*, which tasks you with rescuing people from buildings during disasters. *GamesMaster* awarded it 83% and *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* 7/10, with the former calling it "one of the most stylish games available on PSP" and the latter criticising "inevitable repetition and occasionally heavy controls". It was also a month for old favourites. You could enjoy Sony's modernised version of *Lemmings* (8/10 *Official PS2*, 6/10 *Edge*) or Capcom's updated port of *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max* (85% *GamesMaster*, 8/10 *Official PS2*).

» [PC] *Commandos: Strike Force* was the antithesis of *Black*.

Join us again next month, when we'll be hoping for an April shower of new games to play. *

» [PC] A fleet of Borg Hexagons open fire on the Krenim weapon ship.

» [Xbox] We still can't believe that the sequel to *Black* was canned during early development.

CHARTS

MARCH 2006

XBOX 360

1 – Call Of Duty 2 (Activision)
2 – Project Gotham Racing 3 (Microsoft)
3 – Perfect Dark Zero (Microsoft)
4 – Dead Or Alive 4 (Tecmo)
5 – Need For Speed: Most Wanted (EA)

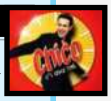
PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Need For Speed: Most Wanted (EA)
2 – Peter Jackson's King Kong (Ubisoft)
3 – Narnia: The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe (Buena Vista)
4 – Buzz! The Music Quiz (Sony)
5 – Pro Evolution Soccer 5 (Konami)

PC

1 – Football Manager 2006 (Sega)
2 – Age Of Empires III (Microsoft)
3 – The Sims 2 (EA)
4 – Call Of Duty 2 (Activision)
5 – Civilization IV (Take 2)

MUSIC



1 – It's Chico Time (Chico)
2 – No Tomorrow (Orson)
3 – Beep (Pussycat Dolls & Will.I.Am)
4 – Red Dress (Sugababes)
5 – Put Your Records On (Corinne Bailey Rae)

THIS MONTH IN…

Official Xbox Magazine

Midway has cancelled the PAL releases of *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* and Spy Hunter, with at least *MK* being due to concerns over "poor unit sales". Beyond *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*, Midway's Xbox schedule "looks fairly bleak".

Edge

Edge's Amusement Trades Exhibition International report is surprisingly positive, saying that games like *The House Of The Dead 4* and *Time Crisis 4* "managed to shift the atmosphere of the show closer to a home gaming crowd's cheering enthusiasm".

NGC

According to marketing surveys, Nintendo's next console will feature a Virtual Console service offering emulated classic games. *NGC* is hopeful that this will deliver "a hi-res *GoldenEye* at a silky 60 frames per second".

Cybernoid II: The Revenge

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1988 » HEWSON CONSULTANTS

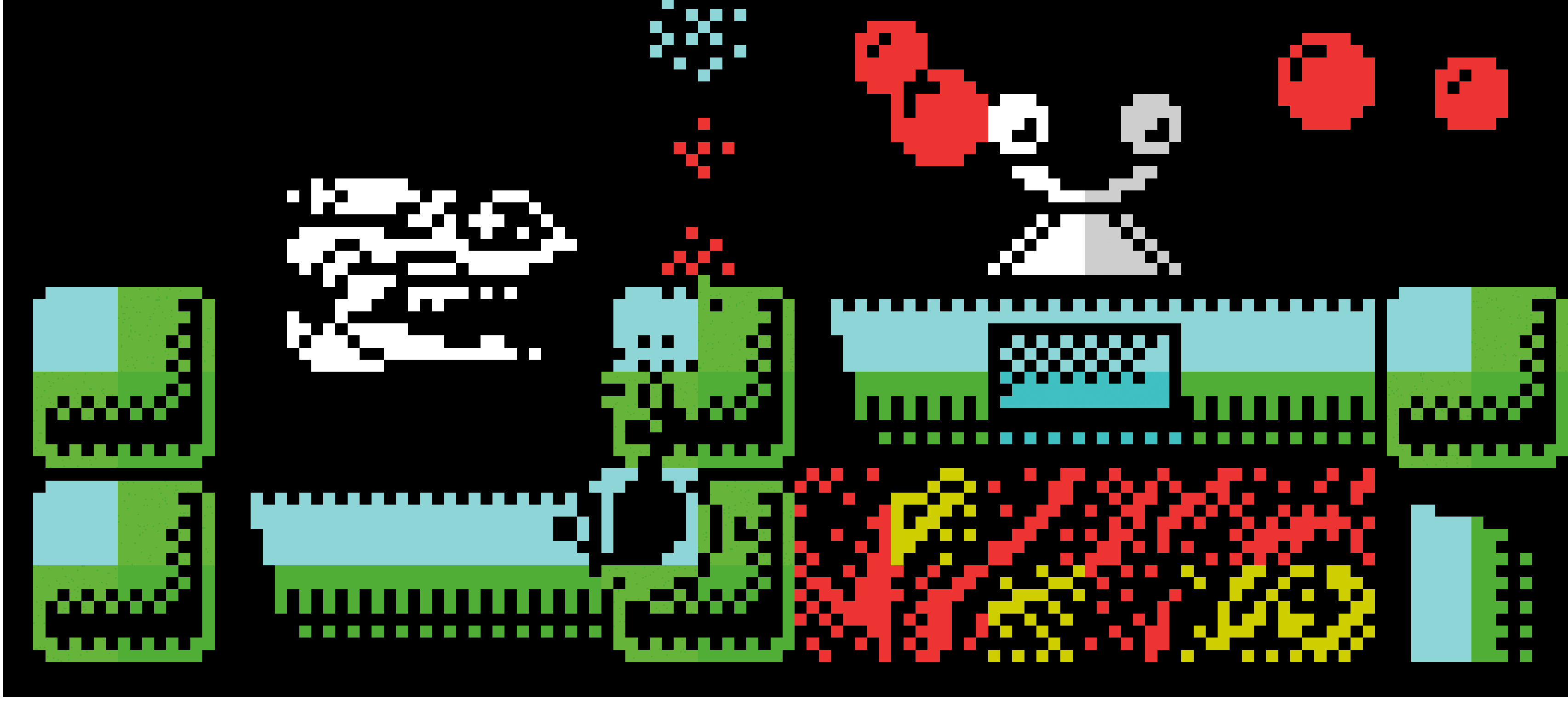
I've always loved Raffaele Cecco's games and I went to great lengths to interview him for *games™* when I started on the magazine. There's an energy and vibrancy to his games that not only made them stand out from their peers, but also gave them the same kind of slick arcade-like feel that could be found in the many titles published by Ultimate Play The Game.

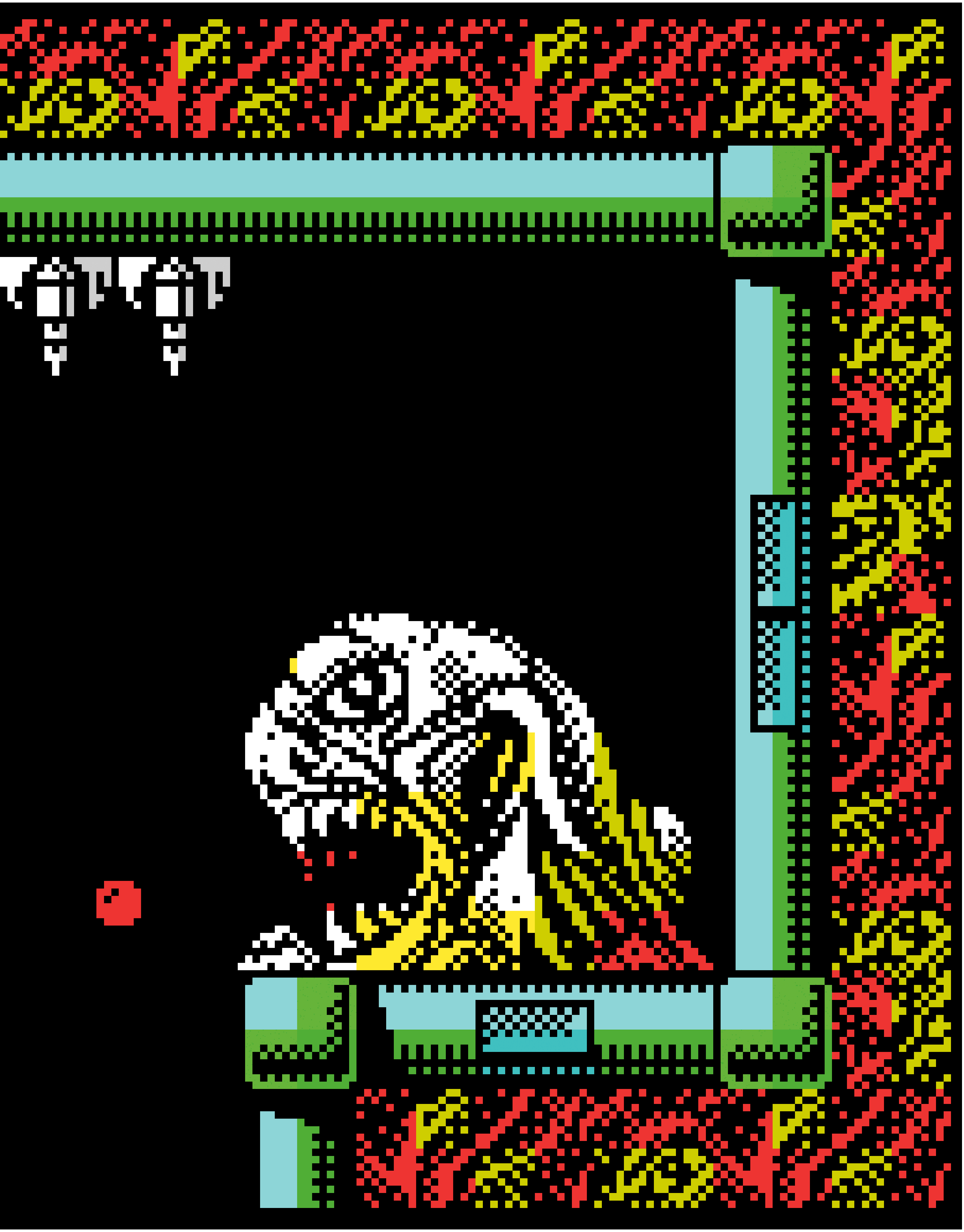
Cybernoid II doesn't really do too much to build on Raffaele's first game, but in my opinion it never really needed to. Yes I like evolution in my games, but if something isn't broke there's not really much point in trying to fix it and the core mechanics of the original *Cybernoid* were very sound indeed.

What I love about the *Cybernoid* games is that they are as much about strategy as they are about shooting – each screen effectively presents you with a puzzle to solve and you have to work out how best to complete it. Yes you'll be doing some shooting along the way, but solving a route through each screen is just as satisfying as gunning down enemies.

Another thing I enjoy is the clever rhythm both games have. You often need to wait for opportunities so that you can sneak past the carefully measured layers of bullets that gun emplacements spit out, or look for small nooks that you can slip into in order to avoid a quick death. I've always found it to be immensely satisfying trying to work out a safe route through each screen while gathering up treasure dropped by downed foes.

Cybernoid II perfects the clever mix first offered by *Cybernoid* and adds punchier visuals, some smart level design and great audio. It's not particularly easy, but if you're looking for something a little different you'll discover a game that challenges your brain as much as your trigger finger. *





50 YEARS OF ATARI

TO MARK ITS HALF CENTURY, WE REVISIT THE TRIUMPHS AND DISASTERS OF THE COMPANY THAT INVENTED THE VIDEOGAME BUSINESS. WELCOME TO THE ATARI STORY, TOLD DECADE BY DECADE BY THE PEOPLE WHO WERE THERE

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY, MARTYN CARROLL AND NICK THORPE

“I was ready for the chaos,” says Atari Inc cofounder Nolan Bushnell, with that familiar knowing smile. “I was surprised how quickly we grew but it didn’t flummox me. There’s a saying that good luck happens to the prepared.”

Though we are celebrating 50 years since Nolan, along with Ted Dabney, started Atari, the idea of creating a company which produced commercial videogames stretched back into the previous decade. Nolan combined his experience of working at an amusement park in the mid-Sixties with the fun he’d had playing *Spacewar!* in the AI lab at Stanford with his *Go*-playing friends later in the decade, concluding if he could somehow put a coin slot on this compelling game of deep-space combat, the quarters would roll in.

He was right – but the prohibitively high costs of the technology meant his concept could not be realised until the start of the Seventies. *Computer Space*, produced by Nutting Associates in 1971, looked wonderfully futuristic, with its curvaceous cabinet and space-age setting, yet it was the simple and blocky *Pong*, released the following year, which properly announced the arrival of Atari.

In the subsequent years, Atari became synonymous with videogames. The creativity, the invention, the huge profits, the big money licences, the wild partying, the all-nighters of crunch time, the coder burn outs, the excesses and the industry crashes… it all started with Atari. Though it established its brand in the arcade business, Atari was soon expanding into other fields, first home consoles, then microcomputers, pinball and handhelds. Its distinctive logo has appeared on innumerable titles across a myriad of formats, as well as adorning a million T-Shirts – it even appears in both *Blade Runner* films.

As we reflect on its first half century, we wonder if Nolan can sum up what made Atari become the fastest-growing company in American history. “We focussed on innovation, full stop,” he decides. “We created a culture in which we valued outcome over profit.” Given he sold the company to Warner Communications in 1976 for $28 million, the profits did indeed follow, but it’s that spirit of wanting to give players new experiences, through its games and machines, which we will celebrate across the last five decades.

And the journey isn’t over yet. Atari has a new CEO, Wade Rosen, a proud retro gamer, who wants to champion the company’s rich past as well as making it a major player in videogaming’s future. We asked Atari’s first boss if he had any advice for its current one? “I think Wade is exactly what the company needed,” says Nolan. “He understands games and values the brand. I believe he needs to find a way to think out of the box and do something somewhat revolutionary. It’s much more difficult than doing something evolutionary but that’s where you create exceptional value.” It’s no small task, but at least we know the revolution will be televised. ▶

DEFINING FIGURES

NOLAN BUSHNELL

■ Cofounder and public face of Atari during its formative years, his drive and vision made the company internationally recognised. A biopic is long overdue.

TED DABNEY

■ Though he sold his share of the company to Nolan in 1973, Ted’s role in cofounding Atari and producing its early arcade titles was pivotal. He sadly passed away in 2018.

AL ALCORN

■ Atari’s first engineer, Al was instrumental in creating *Pong*, the home *Pong* console and the VCS, along with many other innovative products and prototypes.

MIKE HALLY

■ Mike joined Atari in the Seventies and was there to close the doors 25 years later. Along the way, he had a hand in such classics as *Gravitar*, *STUN Runner* and *Star Wars*.

AND THE REST

■ There are many Atari alumni we could mention, including Dan Van Elderen who was Atari's long-serving staff member and eventually became president of Atari Games in the Nineties. Ray Kassar became Atari's CEO after the Warner takeover, but was fired in 1983 as the company tanked. Dona Bailey was one of the first female engineers to work in coin-op, and worked on *Centipede* with Ed Logg, while Dave Theurer worked on numerous arcade gems, including *Tempest*, *Missile Command* and *I, Robot*.

ED LOGG

■ Dubbed Atari's 'golden boy', Ed was responsible for some of its biggest arcade hits, including *Centipede*, *Gauntlet* and Atari's most successful coin-op, *Asteroids*.

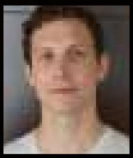
HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW

■ Howard's first three VCS titles – *Yars' Revenge*, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and *ET* – all sold a million. Read about his incredible journey in his book, *Once Upon Atari*.

JACK TRAMIEL

■ Famous for founding Commodore, he bought Atari's consumer division in 1984 in the wake of the industry crash and played a key role in bringing the Atari ST to market.

WADE ROSEN



■ Atari's current CEO. Though considerably younger than the company he now leads, Wade is a dedicated retro gamer and subscriber to our magazine. Respect due.

Ted Dabney Photo credit: Dabney family

THE SEVENTIES

FROM ITS FIRST BIG SUCCESS IN THE ARCADE TO PIONEERING THE CARTRIDGE-BASED CONSOLE, ATARI IN THE SEVENTIES LED THE WAY BUT THE ROAD WAS PAVED WITH POTHOLES AS WELL AS GOLD

All grand adventures start with a single step and for Al Alcorn, it began when he walked into the Atari offices in Santa Clara, California, in June 1972 for his first day as its first employee. "Actually, the company was still called Syzygy then," he corrects us, "and they did have a secretary, Cynthia, who was Nolan's babysitter and used to show up after she got out of high school. I honestly thought Atari would fail after a year or two like most start-ups."

It was a humble beginning for a company which would go on to invent a billion-dollar industry. At this stage, the bills were paid by the revenue from operating a route of pinball tables and other coin-op machines, including several *Computer Space* cabinets, set up in various locations, and while Nolan and Ted worked on a two-player version of their debut, Al was given a very simple brief. "Two paddles and a spot that moves was all Nolan said," remembers Al. "He told me it was going to be a consumer product for General Electrics but that was all bullshit. He just wanted to inspire me to make something as a training exercise to get me started and then he'd throw it away…"

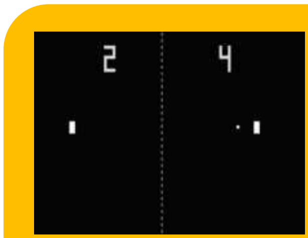
Unaware that Nolan expected *Pong* to bomb, Al got to work on a bench in the front office, using a Tektronic oscilloscope and his knowledge of TTL (transistor-transistor logic) design, and by September 1972, he had a working prototype. Ted hastily constructed a tabletop cabinet and the unit was placed in Andy Capp's Tavern in Sunnyvale, right next to a *Computer Space* cab, appropriately enough. Al explains it's an apocryphal tale that he was called out that same night because the machine had crashed due to an overflowing cash box, but he was pleasantly surprised to find over $100 in quarters a week later, convincing Nolan, who had originally offered the game to both Williams and Bally Midway, that Atari should produce *Pong* itself.

> "I HONESTLY THOUGHT ATARI WOULD FAIL AFTER A YEAR OR TWO LIKE MOST START-UPS"
>
> **AL ALCORN**

Turning Atari from a design studio into a manufacturing company was a challenging task, but *Pong*, a game so simple even the drunk could play it, proved a huge hit. Yet with success came an array of imitators and downright rip-offs from companies eager to grab a piece of the coin-op pie. Atari tried to counter this with new ideas, releasing *Space Race* and the maze game *Gotcha* in 1973 (the latter had a very small run of cabinets with controls shaped like breasts, which collectors pay a fortune to get their hands on), but neither were big hits. Atari thus returned to *Pong*, producing various versions including the cuboid, four-player *Quadrapong*, but it wasn't until it merged with Kee Games, a company created by Nolan as a way to get round exclusive deals with distributors, that it had another major success in the arcade with *Tank*, released in 1974.

Around this time, Atari took a bold and ultimately lucrative step into the consumer market, beginning with a home version of *Pong*. "We knew we would have to create a single custom chip," explains Al, "which I'd never done before and didn't see how we could… but Nolan insisted. I worked with an engineer I'd hired, Harold Lee, and we were amazed when our design worked! I thought

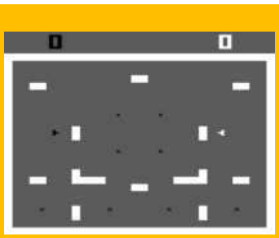
DEFINING GAMES OF THE SEVENTIES



PONG

1972 • ARCADE

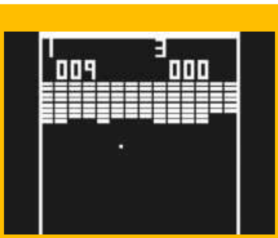
■ *Computer Space*, released the previous year, may have been the first commercial arcade machine, but *Pong* is the title that introduced videogames to the general public. Its design is so beautifully simple, scientists have even taught brain cells in a dish to play it.



TANK

1974 • ARCADE

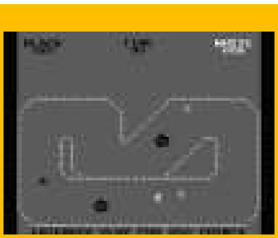
■ Developed by Steve Bristow and Lyle Rains at subsidiary Kee Games, *Tank* was the hit game Atari desperately needed to survive a difficult financial period. Numerous sequels followed, adding more players, and it inspired the VCS pack-in game, *Combat*.



BREAKOUT

1976 • ARCADE

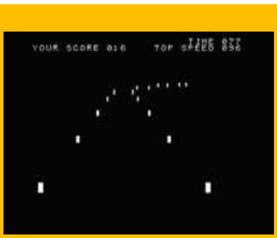
■ Designed by Nolan and farmed out to a young Atari employee, Steve Jobs, to work on (who in turn got his talented friend, Steve Wozniak, to do the heavy lifting), this bat, ball and brick affair was a huge success and its legacy can still be seen in games like *Arkanoid* and *Puchi Carat*.



SPRINT

1976 • ARCADE

■ The Seventies saw the birth of many videogaming genres and the top-down racer is one that endures to this day. Dennis Koble, who would go on to cofound Imagic and create the *PGA Tour Golf* series, cut his teeth with this slick, multiplayer driving game.

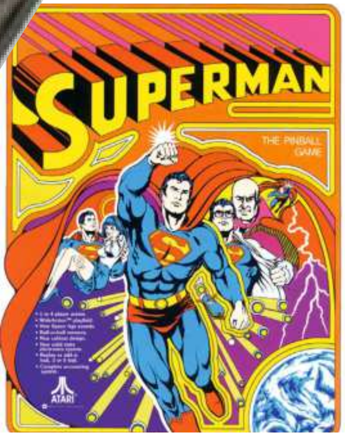


NIGHT DRIVER

1976 • ARCADE

■ Not content with offering a bird's-eye view of the action, Atari pioneered the first-person racer the same year. Inspired by electro-mechanical machines such as *Speedway* and obscure German arcade game, *Nurburgring 1*, *Night Driver* was a thrilling ride, especially when played on a sit-down cabinet.

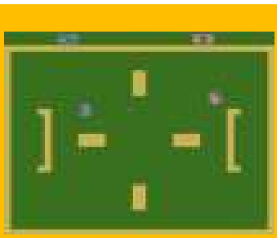
adventure
space invaders
paddle
paddle
ATARI



» Atari entered the pinball market in 1975. *Superman*, designed by Steve Ritchie and featuring striking artwork by George Opperman, and sound by a young Eugene Jarvis, was its best table.

that was the hard part done but boy, was I wrong. I had to design all of the other components, from the RF modulator to the plastic case, and the injection moulding tooling to make that cost almost as much as the custom chip. All this with a staff of five!"

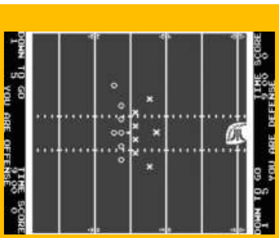
Released in 1975, Atari's home *Pong* was distributed by Sears and initially sold under its brand name, Tele-Games. It did well at retail, shifting an estimated 200,000 units over the next few years, though its success attracted the attention of Magnavox, the producers of the first home console back in 1972. Its machine, the Odyssey, designed by the late Ralph Baer, had clearly 'inspired' *Pong* in the first place and Atari paid a reported $1.5 million to become an official licensee. With that kind of money involved, the consumer market was obviously an avenue worth pursuing, as was the positive relationship established with Sears, and development soon began on what would become the Atari Video Computer System – VCS, for short. "It was the right technology at the right time," says Nolan. "The microprocessor had just become available and we saw the opportunity." Again, Al Alcorn was a key member of the development team. As executive project leader, he managed the small team designing the chips and software and is also proud to have done some astute headhunting. "The product design engineering was done by the excellent team we hired away from National Semiconductor," he grins. "The first year of production [of the VCS in 1977] was reasonably successful but then sales fell off the next year. Normally, we would have started design on the next-generation



COMBAT

1977 • ATARI VCS

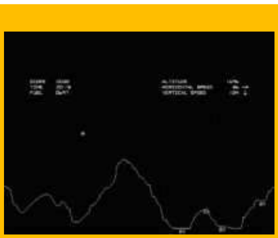
■ It may have been based on *Tank*, but this ubiquitous VCS cartridge added much to the mix with 27 different modes, featuring invisible mazes, bendy bullets and satisfying ricochet kills. Best of all are the aerial battles, with jets, biplanes and concealing clouds.



ATARI FOOTBALL

1978 • ARCADE

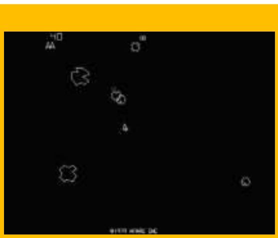
■ More groundbreaking work as Atari enters the sports simulation arena with this graphically simple but tactically deep take on the American interpretation of football. *Soccer* was released the following year, increasing the number of players – and trackball controllers – to four.



LUNAR LANDER

1979 • ARCADE

■ Atari's first game to use a vector display, this coincided nicely with the tenth anniversary of the Moon landings. Designed by Howard Delman, it took the old text-based lunar-landing concept prevalent on mainframes and turned it into a tense arcade affair.



ASTEROIDS

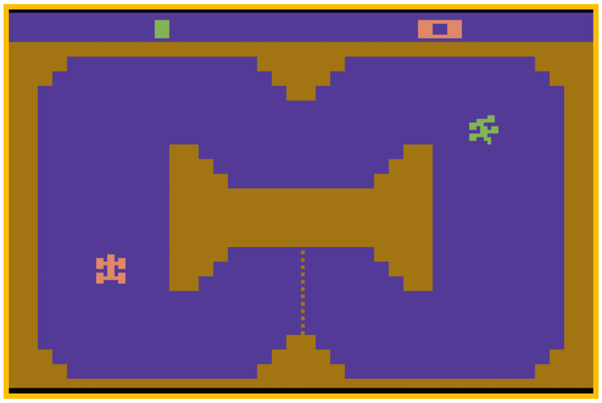
1979 • ARCADE

■ Ed Logg's and arguably Atari coin-op's finest hour – and talking of hours, the current high score on *Asteroids* of over 41 million points took John McAllister 58 hours to achieve on a single credit. We could watch those rocks float gracefully for days, too.

HERCULES

1979 • PINBALL

■ Atari's short-lived pinball division made some excellent tables, *Superman* in particular being one of the best of its era, but for something truly unique, this mammoth, 18-square-feet table takes some beating. It's so big it used a pool cue ball rather than the standard metal ball.

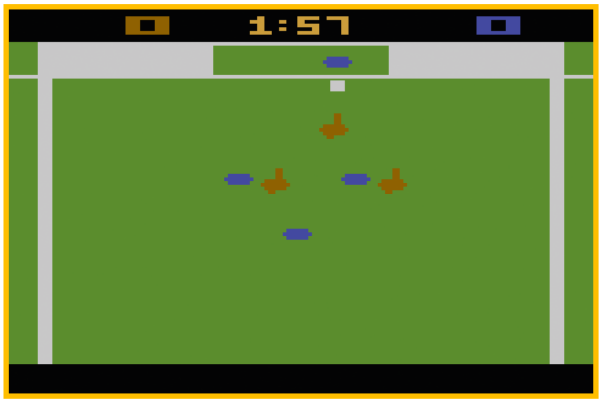


» [Atari VCS] Based on the 1975 arcade game *Indy 800*, *Indy 500* was a fun top-down racer for Atari's home console.

» Atari's *Touch Me* was a copy of MB's handheld *Simon*, which in turn was 'heavily based' on Atari's arcade title *Touch Me* from 1974. What goes around…

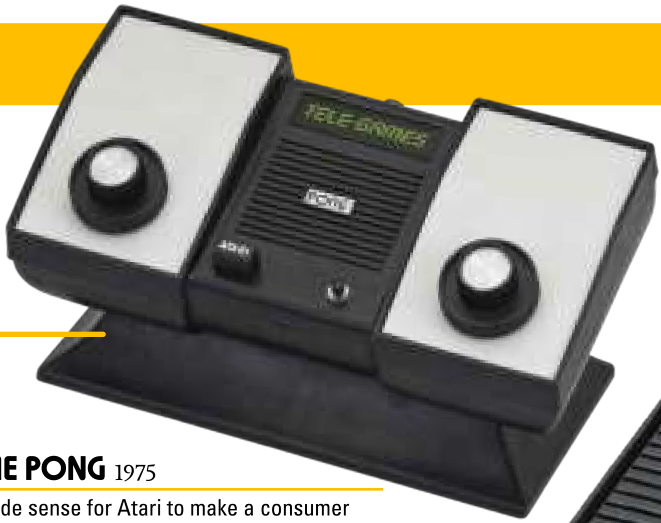
ATARI
TOUCH ME

PHOTO CREDIT: JOE HAUPT



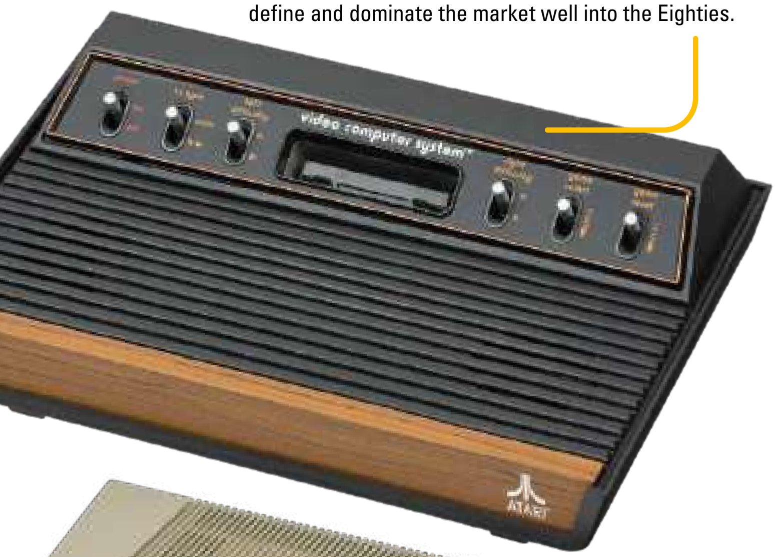
» [Atari VCS] *Pelé's Soccer* – Long before EA and Audiogenic, Atari knew the power of attaching famous names to mediocre products.

DEFINING SYSTEMS



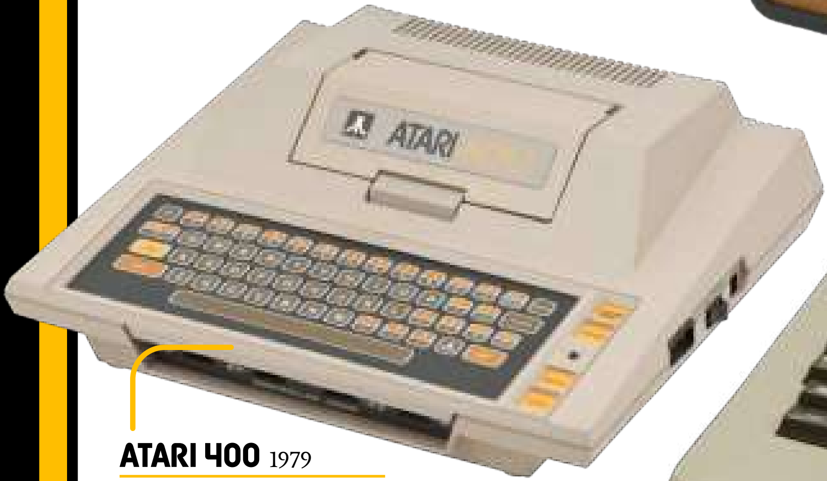
HOME PONG 1975

■ It made sense for Atari to make a consumer version of its arcade hit and it followed it with a dedicated *Stunt Cycle* console before recognising a cartridge-based system was the way forward.



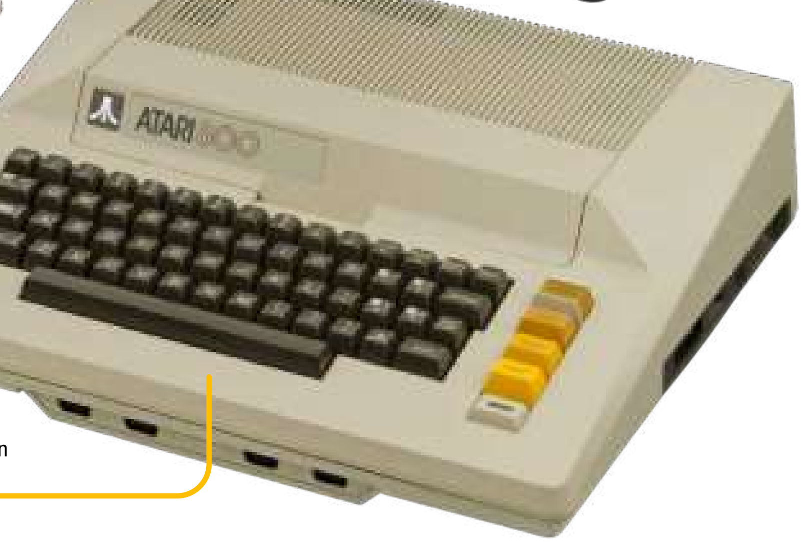
ATARI VCS 1977

■ Fairchild's Video Entertainment System might have been the first console to use interchangeable cartridges when released in 1976, but the VCS would define and dominate the market well into the Eighties.



ATARI 400 1979

■ With its distinctive membrane keyboard and four joystick ports as standard, Atari's entry-level machine may only have 8K of RAM as standard but brilliant games like *Star Raiders* showcased its potential.



ATARI 800 1979

■ Adding a decent, typewriter-style keyboard, an extra cartridge port and 'hidden' slots to allow convenient memory expansion did not stop the cheaper 400 model outselling it by a considerable margin.

▶ product but Warner Communications and Ray Kassar [appointed by Warner as president of Atari in 1978] were not comfortable doing this. They poured support into the VCS and eventually sales skyrocketed but I tried to explain to Ray that if we didn't design the next-generation product, our competition would.”

History would of course prove Al correct but in the short term, Warner's huge investment paid even bigger dividends. Its purchase of Atari was prompted by Nolan believing his company would not be able to launch the VCS into the home market without Warner's financial backing. He sold Atari for a cool $28 million and remained on the board, though left acrimoniously a few years later. “I was initially optimistic,” admits Nolan, “but the appointment of Ray Kassar, who knew nothing about games or technology and who had a very different approach to corporate culture, was demoralising and made me lose faith in the new owners.”

> “THE ATARI 400/800 COMPUTERS WERE A DREAM TO PROGRAM AFTER THE VCS”
> **DENNIS KOBLE**

It was out with the hot tubs and in with layers of besuited managers and marketing executives. Early cartridge releases for the VCS were often based on Atari's arcade properties – *Combat*, which riffed on the two-player battles of *Tank*, being the most obvious example – but the late-Seventies also saw some genuinely original titles appear on the console. “You could basically do what the hell you wanted at Atari,” says Warren Robinett, who joined the new consumer division in 1977. “On day one, my boss, Larry Kaplan, [who would go on to cofound Activision], just said, ‘Your job is to design videogames. Now go design one.’”

For a new programmer, this kind of freedom was both daunting and liberating. Armed with little more than a VCS, a manual and his own youthful enthusiasm, Warren would go on to design and code *Adventure*, his hugely ambitious attempt to translate the text adventures he had played on a mainframe computer during his college days into a joystick-controlled console title. The game broke much new ground, with an expansive world to explore, objects to interact with via a real-time inventory and NPCs which existed even if off-screen, moving and acting independently of the player based on their own ‘motivations’. *Adventure*'s final code was submitted in 1979, though it was not officially released until early 1980, and Warren then decided to leave Atari. *Adventure* sold over a million units, and hinted at the possibilities of what this exciting new medium could offer. “Oh, I didn't get any congratulations from Atari,” sighs Warren. “No pat on the back. Not even a pizza. Royalties? Hell, no! I was disgusted and kind of burned out, so it felt it was the right time to quit. And I'd left my little ‘Fuck You’ secret in there.”

He's referring to *Adventure*'s infamous hidden room, which contained the first example of an Easter egg in a videogame – his name in flashing lights, defying Atari's policy of keeping its programmers strictly anonymous. Warren left Atari in 1979, the same year the company entered another emerging market – the home micro. Dennis Koble, who had previously programmed arcade hits like *Sprint* and had headed-up Atari's handheld division, which had produced *Touch Me*, became the manager of the games division for the new home computers. “The 400/800 computers were a dream to program after the VCS,” he says. “They were well-designed and had a friendly development environment. And you got nice colours! I had hired Chris Crawford and Dale Yocum and together we created the Atari Program Exchange (APX) for aspiring programmers to sell [their work].”

It was a sign of Atari's overarching confidence that in the second half of the Seventies, it even set up its own pinball division, competing directly with long-established market leaders like Gottlieb and Williams. “The pinball group was really growing,” remembers Mike Hally, who joined Atari in late 1977. “They'd done *The Atarians* and *Airborne Avenger* and everyone seemed really excited about the future. We had a vision of changing the entire production process, replacing mechanical components and using new materials to create much more reliable machines. In 1979 we released *Superman* and the giant *Hercules* table but then management decided we needed to reduce costs and possibly move to Chicago and that started the decline. If we'd survived, I really think we could have done something special.”

Atari's pinball dreams faded and even in the arcade business, it was not having everything its own way. The rise of competitors in the USA and especially in Japan, notably Taito with its all-conquering *Space Invaders*, meant Atari was no longer the only major player. It needed a response and it came in November 1979 with the release of *Asteroids*, which would go on to be Atari's biggest-selling coin-op, and suddenly things were shining as brightly as those vectors once more. ▶

FUJI FOREVER

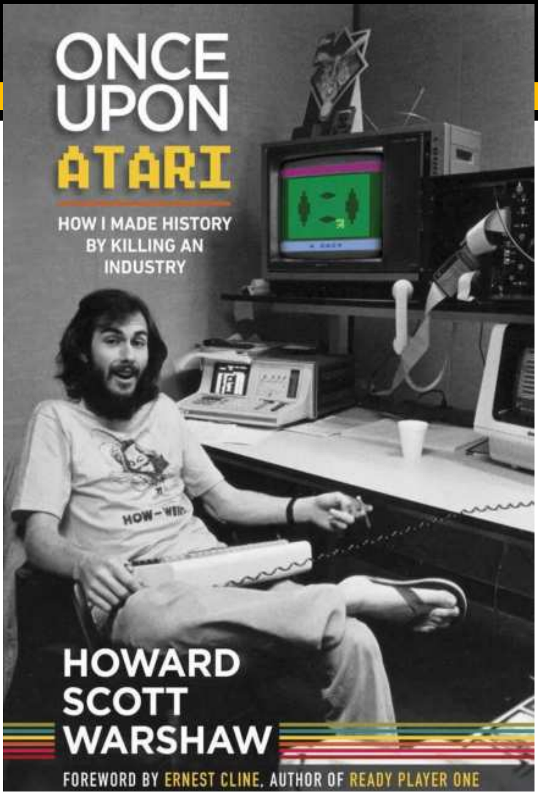
■ One constant in the Atari story is its striking logo, long referred to as Fuji after its resemblance to the Japanese mountain. In 1972, Evelyn Seto was a production artist, working for George Opperman who had produced the original design, and it was her task to create the artwork for printing. “This was pre-computers, so it was done by hand,” she explains. “I had to draw and ink the symbol using tools such as French curves and Rapidograph technical drawing pens. We used the font style Harry for ‘ATARI’. I was intimately involved in creating that ‘master artwork’ and George's design has stood the test of time.” Tim Lapetino, author of *Art Of Atari*, agrees. “It is simple and memorable but logos don't live in a vacuum. It benefitted from an association with a string of great arcade and console videogames, standout illustration and incredible advertising. Atari set the bar for visual design in quality and imagination in the games industry by bringing creatives from other industries to lead its efforts.”

PHOTO CREDIT: STRONG MUSEUM

» (L-R) Evelyn Seto, George Opperman and Bob Flemate working on the artwork for Atari's *Airborne Avenger* pinball table.

THE EIGHTIES

AS THE NEW NEON-TINGED DECADE ROLLED AROUND ATARI WAS IN A VERY GOOD PLACE. BOTH ITS ARCADE AND HOME DIVISIONS WERE FORGING AHEAD, BUOYED BY EXCITING NEW PRODUCT LAUNCHES, WITH NO APPARENT HEADWINDS ON THE HORIZON


ONCE UPON ATARI
HOW I MADE HISTORY BY KILLING AN INDUSTRY
HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW
FOREWORD BY ERNEST CLINE, AUTHOR OF READY PLAYER ONE

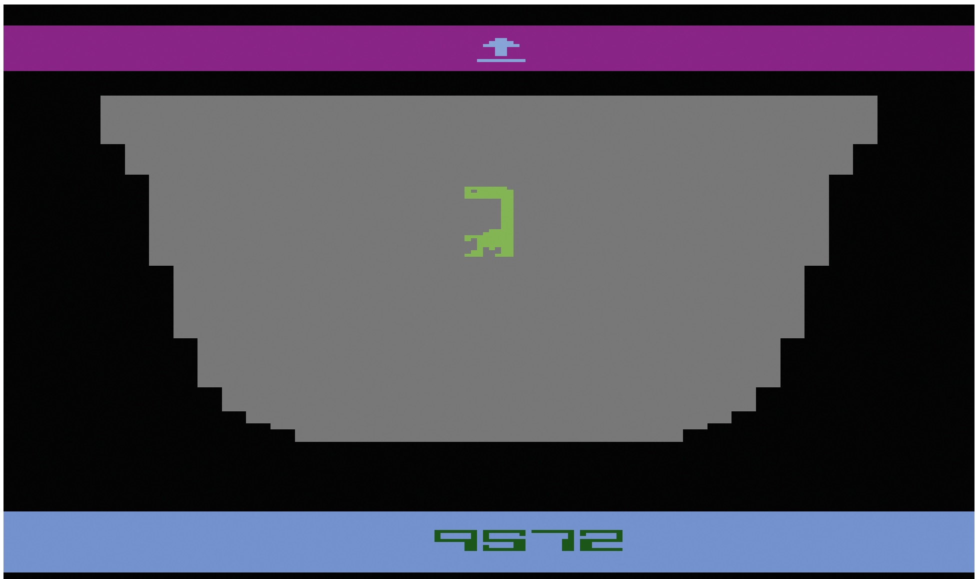
» "It took me four years and about 300 pages to sum up my time at Atari." Howard's highly recommended account of his Atari days is available to buy at OnceUponAtari.com

A*steroids* became a huge hit and was one of the titles that helped usher in the so-called golden age of arcade videogames. The momentum continued with hit after hit after *hit*: *Battlezone*, *Missile Command*, *Centipede*, *Tempest*, *Crystal Castles*. Outside of the arcades, the new 400 and 800 computers had little competition in the home market and saw sales double year on year – at least until 1983 when the newly launched Commodore 64 weighed in. Elsewhere, the Atari VCS suddenly hit high gear, having ticked along for several years. The catalyst was the conversion of *Space Invaders* which quadrupled sales of the hardware and helped the VCS become the biggest-selling console of its generation. Atari had previously converted some of its arcade hits to the VCS, but the success of *Space Invaders* saw it double down with versions of *Asteroids*, *Missile Command*, *Warlords* and *Centipede* all arriving and becoming hugely popular.

Despite Atari's success, it wasn't always easy converting the latest coin-op hits to the primitive VCS hardware. Just ask Howard Scott Warshaw. On joining Atari in 1981 he was tasked with bringing Cinematronics' *Star Castle* to the VCS. "I explained to my manager that a vector graphics game involving concentric rotating circles would not translate well," he says. "I presented him with an alternative screen layout and gameplay that I believed was much better adapted to the VCS." Rather than telling this new-start to collect his things, Howard's manager accepted his analysis and he began working on the new design. It was released in 1982 as *Yars' Revenge* and it would become Atari's biggest-selling original VCS game.

> "I HAVE ANALYSED THIS FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND I THINK IT'S CLEAR THAT ET WAS NOT THE CAUSE OF THE VIDEOGAME CRASH"
> **HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW**

This success resulted in Howard being chosen to design and program games based on two huge Stephen Spielberg movies. The first, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, was a great game. The second, *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*, was not. Written in just six weeks to hit a Christmas 1982 deadline, *ET* was a commercial success but a critical bomb. Along with the lousy VCS version of *Pac-Man*, *ET* went some way to highlighting Atari's arrogance to consumers, assuming that they'd buy any old tat providing it had a big licence slapped on it. Worse, the game is often singled out as one of the key contributors to the infamous videogame crash that rocked the US industry in 1982. Howard has written at length about this in his book *Once Upon Atari: How I Made History By Killing An Industry*, but was it really Howard in the hall with the lead pipe? "This is one of the great videogame debates," he says, smiling. "I have analysed this from multiple perspectives and I think it's clear that *ET* was not the cause of the videogame crash. It was, however, symptomatic of the kind of thinking and acting that did cause the crash."



» [Atari 2600] ET falls down his hole *again* in the infamous home-console tie-in. For those that purchased a copy on the back of watching the biggest movie of 1982, it wasn't so much "phone home" as "phone the store and check their returns policy".

Atari's home division suffered several other missteps prior to the crash, particularly when it came to new hardware launches. The long-awaited successor to the VCS, the Atari 5200, arrived in 1982 – which prompted the VCS to be rebranded as the Atari 2600, implying that the new console was 'twice' as good. Rather than a powerful arcade-at-home system, as originally conceived, the 5200 was basically a console-ised version of the Atari 400 computer. The new machine faced stiff competition from the ColecoVision and Atari's own resurgent 2600, which the 5200 was not out-of-the-box compatible with. The 5200 failed to take flight and it was discontinued 18 months later, having never even received a PAL release. The 5200's limited run was generous compared to that of the 1200XL computer, the successor to the 400/800 line. Featuring more memory and not much else, the new model arrived in early 1983 and departed by the summer; seemingly sunk by premium pricing. It was replaced by the 600XL and 800XL models which were better positioned to battle it out in the 8-bit price war which Commodore was waging on its competitors, but they couldn't come close to matching the sales of the C64.

DEFINING SYSTEMS

ATARI 5200 1982

The 5200 was a rather strange system in that it shared the same hardware as Atari's 8-bit computers yet it couldn't run their carts. Its non-centring joysticks were equally curious, as was its choice of pack-in, the ancient *Super Breakout*.

ATARI 800XL 1983

The 800XL was Atari's best-selling 8-bit computer and it's easy to see why, as it offered the perfect balance between cost and capability. It may have lost out to the C64 but in several regions it was a gutsy runner-up.

ATARI ST 1985

We all know that musicians loved its MIDI ports and it wasn't as powerful or as popular as the Amiga, but the ST was still a very capable 16-bit computer with a wealth of top titles (many of which were given away with the machine).

ATARI 7800 1986

This is the console that the 5200 should have been: a significant step-up over the 2600 yet still able to run the vast library of existing 2600 software. If only this had been released in 1984, as initially proposed.

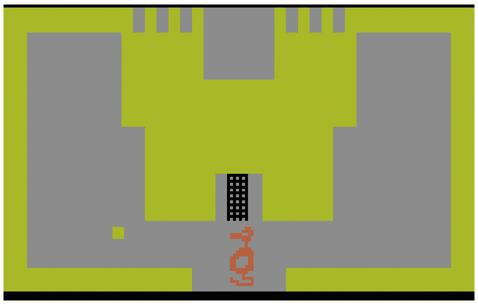
ATARI 2600 JR 1986

Styled on its sibling, the 7800, the cost-reduced 'Junior' model ensured that the 2600 would be a viable gaming platform for a decade and a half. Thanks to its very low price, this was in many ways the original Atari Flashback.

ATARI LYNX 1989

It was the portable that wouldn't fit in your pocket (unless you were wearing clown trousers), and it drained batteries for fun, but the Lynx was home to many technically impressive games that belied its handheld status.

All this meant that the Atari business was in decline – or to quote Roger Cohen in the *New York Times*, it suffered an "off-the-cliff collapse". The value of parent company Warner's shares dropped sharply, costing the company more than $1billion. Action was unavoidable and it arrived in July 1984 when Warner took a hatchet to Atari, splitting off the home division and selling it to Jack Tramiel and family, previously of Commodore. Tramiel named the company Atari Corporation, while Warner retained the arcade division which was rebranded as Atari Games. ▶



» [Atari 2600] *Adventure* debuted in early 1980 and became a huge hit for Atari, although its creator Warren Robinett received no royalties.

PITFALL!
SPACE SHUTTLE
Adventure
Space Invaders
Combat
STAR WARS THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

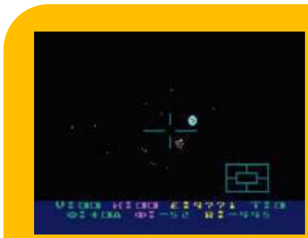
Following the sell-off, Atari Corp only kept on around ten percent of its employees. Howard Scott Warshaw was not one of them. “The Tramiel takeover signalled the end of Atari history as we knew it,” he says, ruefully. “That event destroyed one of the key resources that was keeping Atari going at that point – denial! That sale made the new world crystal clear. It became obvious that the Tramiels had no interest in making videogames for the VCS, they were there to make a personal computer [the Atari ST]. And after an eye-popping personal interview with Jack Tramiel, it was clear to me that my videogame career had come to an end, at least for the foreseeable future.”

> “ON MARBLE MADNESS WE WORKED TIRELESSLY FOR TEN MONTHS, OFTEN SLEEPING UNDER THE LAB BENCH”
>
> **BOB FLANAGAN**

Although the crash in the US did affect the coin-op industry, forcing a number of arcades to close, it was largely business as usual for Atari Games. Many of the key figures like Mike Hally, Dave Theurer and Ed Logg remained and they were joined by a bunch of new recruits working on games for advanced 68000-powered hardware. One of those was Bob Flanagan who started in 1984 as a programmer and remembers how supportive his colleagues were. “In my first three months at Atari I worked with John Salwitz, Dave Ralston and Doug Snyder on *Paperboy*. I learned from all three about the different aspects of coin-op software and hardware design. After that I worked closely with Hal Canon who taught me about new ways to integrate gameplay and music. Just before I started work with Mark Cerny on *Marble Madness*, Hal and I tried to put forward a game based on Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* video, but it was rejected by Jackson’s team.”

Atari might have been told to beat it on that occasion, but licences were big business in the arcades and coin-ops based on the *Star Wars* trilogy, *Road Runner* and *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* became evergreen hits. But licences were also costly, so the developers were encouraged to create original works. This bore brilliant results in the mid-Eighties with another wave of hits including the four-player dungeon-crawler *Gauntlet*. “After finishing *Marble Madness* Ed Logg asked for me to work with him on *Gauntlet*,” says Bob. “I was in awe of Ed, who became my first long-term mentor.” Although the developers were encouraged to innovate, Bob remembers that there were strict deadlines to meet. “The milestones were always significant and the pressure really was from Ed and I internally to meet the deadlines. Ed was a phenomenal project scheduler so we didn’t have to kill ourselves, like Mark and I did on *Marble Madness*. On that one we worked tirelessly for ten months, often sleeping under the lab bench to catch a few hours.”

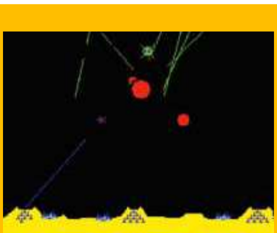
DEFINING GAMES OF THE EIGHTIES



STAR RAIDERS

1980 • ATARI 400/800

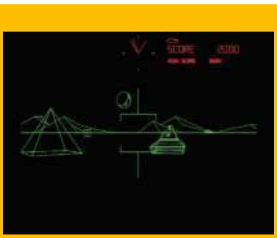
■ The masterful *Star Raiders* was the original ‘space opera’, arriving years before *Elite* and deftly mixing exploration, strategy and shooting. Jeff Minter is a huge fan of the game, calling it “the best… 8K of sheer 6502 code poetry”. We can’t argue with that.



MISSILE COMMAND

1980 • ARCADE

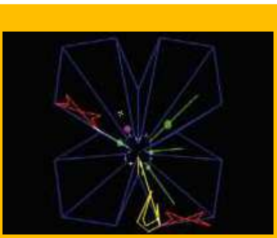
■ This product of the Cold War era sees players protecting the homeland from enemy missile attacks using a trackball-controlled defence system. It starts sedately enough but quickly turns into a frantic race against time as you desperately attempt to avoid ‘THE END’. Chilling.



BATTLEZONE

1980 • ARCADE

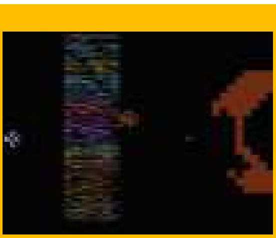
■ Take Atari’s *Tank* from 1974, rework it with wireframe vector graphics and display it in the first-person and you have *Battlezone*, the first arcade game to really immerse players in a 3D conflict. The dual-joystick controls and viewfinder pull you in further.



TEMPEST

1981 • ARCADE

■ ‘QuadraScan Color’ might have been a silly name for Atari’s new display tech that debuted with *Tempest*, but the visuals it generated were spectacular. And once married to an intense space shooter the result is a game that threatens to overload the senses.



YARS’ REVENGE

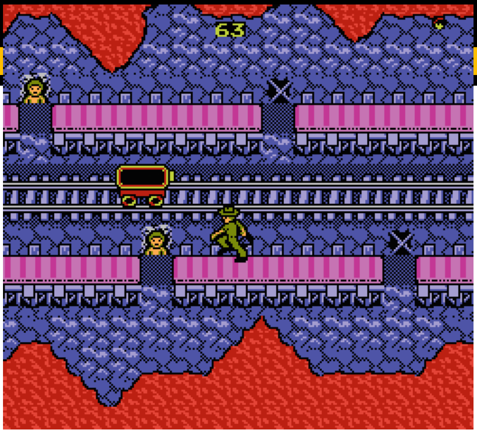
1982 • ATARI 2600

■ Simple shooters are ten a penny on the 2600. This is not one of them. It has rules and quirks and secrets and a level of challenge that eludes its rivals. There are few more satisfying videogame moments than firing a Zorlon Cannon right up the evil Qotile’s exhaust port.

There was little time to rest over at Atari Corp where Tramiel's focus was on developing the Atari ST, a low-cost 16-bit home computer. The ST went on general sale in July 1985, just 12 months after the buy-out, surprising even the most cynical observer. The rush was to ensure the ST debuted at the same time as the Amiga, Commodore's rival computer. Keen to crush his old firm in this new 16-bit battle, Tramiel needed a war chest and enlisted that old trooper, the 2600 to help supply it.

"Jack was pinning his hopes on the ST and needed 2600 sales to help fund the on-going development costs," says Mike Katz, formerly of Epyx and Mattel, who was tasked with revitalising Atari's console line following the launch of the NES in the US. "If we could get the price down on hardware and software, and introduce some good new games, the plan was to make the 2600 the 'low-priced spread' for gamers who could not afford the NES. So we redesigned the hardware, dropped the price to $49.95, sold the games for less than $10, and put out a catchy TV commercial."

It worked. Atari had sold 20 million 2600s and following the release of the cost-reduced 2600 Jr in 1986, it would go on to sell a further 10 million. However, the arrival of the NES prompted Atari to consider a new console that would compete more directly with Nintendo's machine. And it had one in its back pocket. The Atari 7800 was due to be released in summer 1984 but it was shelved following the Tramiel takeover. It was dusted down and finally released in 1986, but it failed to slow Nintendo's advance. "The 7800 always had a tough time competing with the NES because of Nintendo's game library of arcade hits," says Mike. "Plus, for gamers the next logical system had to be 16-bit with better graphics, animation and sound."



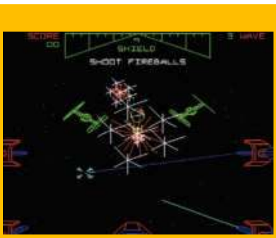
» [NES] While chiefly a coin-op coder, Bob Flanagan also wrote several games for consoles including the NES conversion of *Temple Of Doom*.

With this in mind, Atari's next console would be 16-bit, only it wouldn't be an under-the-TV box. Epyx had been working on a new handheld system for several years which Atari agreed to manufacture and market as the Lynx. Mike had been involved with handheld games back in his days at Mattel so he could see the opportunity, "I always felt there was a market for a new portable system if there was a library of good games and the price was right." Atari was aware of Nintendo's new Game Boy handheld, but that was an 8-bit toy with a monochrome display, whereas the Lynx was a powerful 16-bit colour system. Both devices were released in the US in 1989 and on paper there was only one winner.

ATARI GENESIS?

■ In our chats Mike Katz confirmed the story that Atari almost licensed Sega's Mega Drive for release in the US. "Sega's management, Dave Rosen and Hayao Nakayama, offered us licensing rights to Sega's 16-bit system that became the Genesis," he revealed. "That would have pitted Atari against Nintendo and given us a 16-bit console to move into the new generation of hardware. I pushed for it and Jack Tramiel said, 'Yes,' but then he reneged over the cost of the licensing deal with Sega. As a result, Sega opened its US division and launched the Genesis itself."

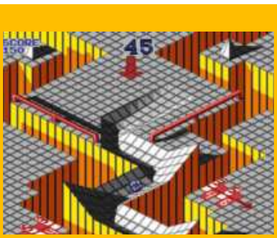
GENESIS
16-BIT



STAR WARS

1983 • ARCADE

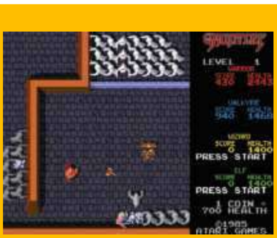
■ For many this game represents a series of 'bests'. It's Atari's best colour vector title, its best movie licence and possibly the best coin-op it ever conceived. The trench run is a stunning setpiece, with players physically ducking and weaving their way through it.



MARBLE MADNESS

1984 • ARCADE

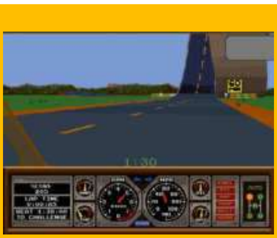
■ The old trackball is used to amazing effect here, as players roll a delicate sphere around isometric 3D levels, teetering on the fine line between speed and safety as the timer ticks down. It's much imitated, especially on home systems, but it's never been bettered.



GAUNTLET

1985 • ARCADE

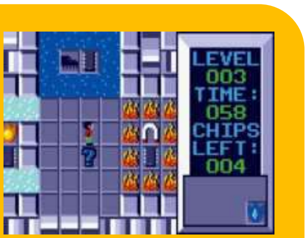
■ Its 'buy-in' mechanic was a pretty brazen way of increasing earnings, and it would have counted for nowt had *Gauntlet* been a dull *Dandy* clone that no one wanted to play. Instead it was the year's hottest coin-op that provided infinite play for up to four players.



HARD DRIVIN'

1989 • ARCADE

■ Dubbed "the world's first driving simulation game", and coming in a deluxe cab that mimicked a real car (right down to the ignition key and clutch), this arcade heavyweight really lived up to its billing. Doing the loop-de-loop at 60mph is hardly realistic but a lot of fun.



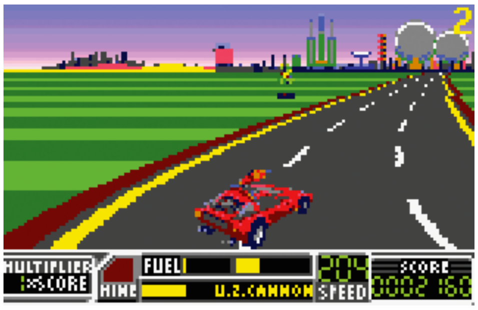
CHIP'S CHALLENGE

1989 • LYNX

■ Launch title *Blue Lightning* showed what the Lynx was capable of, but it was *Chip's Challenge* that delivered what handheld gamers really wanted – a devious puzzler that could be played in quick, short blasts. We wonder how many AA batteries were lost to this challenge.

THE NINETIES

ATARI CORP STARTED THE NINETIES AS IT HAD THE EIGHTIES WITH EXCITING NEW HARDWARE LAUNCHES. BUT AS JAPANESE MANUFACTURERS CORNERED THE CONSOLE MARKET AND THE PC BECAME THE DOMINANT COMPUTER FORMAT, IT BECAME A QUESTION OF WHETHER ATARI WOULD SEE OUT THE DECADE


» [Atari Lynx] The Lynx version of *RoadBlasters* is another impressive conversion job, courtesy of D Scott Williamson.

The Atari Lynx, along with fellow handhelds the Sega Game Gear and NEC TurboExpress, all offered superior hardware to the Game Boy, but Nintendo's device beat them all thanks to better battery life and several other factors. "The Game Boy had a much more attractive price point, plus the popularity of the NES, and brought many big Nintendo licences to the platform," says D Scott Williamson, who converted the Atari coin-op hits *STUN Runner*, *Toki* and *RoadBlasters* to the Lynx. "In my opinion, the quality and depth of gameplay that Nintendo had was not matched by Atari, but we were trying very hard. I was responsible for Lynx developer support at Atari and I worked closely with the guys from Epyx to support Lynx development."

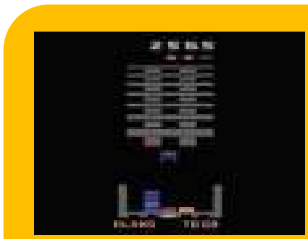
As the Lynx limped on, Atari retained the big-cat-naming convention for its next consoles. The first was the Panther, a 68000-powered console designed to rival the SNES and Mega Drive. Despite being at an advanced stage of development it was ditched in 1991 in favour of the Jaguar, a powerhouse console that launched in 1993 with 64-bit features and advanced 3D capabilities. But due to unconvincing launch software and hardware supply problems (particularly in Europe), the Jaguar failed to take a bite out of the competition. Reflecting on the two consoles D Scott says, "I worked on the Atari Panther and technically it was probably too much like the older Atari 8-bit computers to be competitive. I left Atari during the transition between the Panther and Jaguar, but I think Atari's lack of AAA first-party games created a big hurdle in the marketplace. There was no *Mario* or *Sonic* to sell the console." Trevor McFur just wasn't cut out for the job and the Jaguar became just another footnote in the history of Atari, its potential largely untapped.

> "ATARI WAS SUCH A FUN PLACE TO CALL WORK. WE GREW UP AS A FAMILY AND THAT MADE IT VERY SPECIAL"
> **MIKE HALLY**

Support for the 2600, 7800 and the 8-bit computers ended at the beginning of 1992. The ST continued until 1993, thanks to a number of enhanced models such as the STE, TT and Falcon, but in the end it never came close to matching the Amiga's sales (and by this point, the computer market was dominated by PC compatibles anyway). Following the failure of the Jaguar, the business cancelled all of its software and hardware in 1995. The brand and its IP assets were sold to Hasbro Interactive in 1998, which was later taken over by Infogrames who would use the Atari name initially as a publishing brand.

So Atari Corp did (sort of) survive the decade, but what about Atari Games, the arcade division? The business continued to develop popular coin-ops throughout the early Nineties, with titles like *Klax*, *Pit-Fighter*, *Steel Talons*, *Rampart* and *Race Drivin'* becoming well-known on home systems too. Its biggest hit was 1994's *Primal Rage*, a brutal dino brawler that even spawned its own line of action figures. This success was not enough to greenlight the sequel, however, which was field-tested but not put into full production, seemingly a casualty of the declining arcade industry.

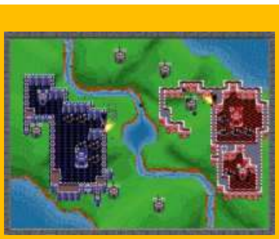
DEFINING GAMES OF THE NINETIES



KLAX

1990 • ATARI 2600

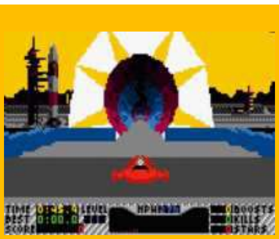
■ It may have only been released in PAL territories, but the fact that Atari was still supporting the 2600 in the Nineties has to be celebrated. Graphics aside it's a very playable version of the coin-op puzzler, with just the two-player option missing.



RAMPART

1990 • ARCADE

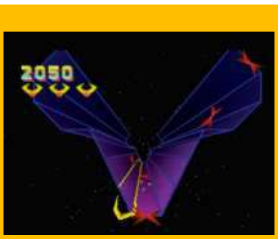
■ This surprising multi-phase arcade game mixes strategy, shoot-'em-up and puzzle elements – a combination that you typically wouldn't expect to find in a coin-op game. No one could accuse Atari of not taking risks with this one.



STUN RUNNER

1991 • ATARI LYNX

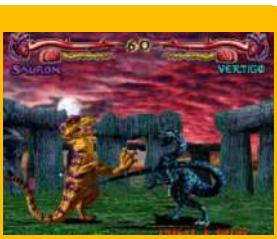
■ Few expected the stunning 3D arcade game to translate to the Lynx with the speed and speech intact, but this portable version somehow managed it. It was and still is the go-to game to show anyone doubting the Lynx's hardware capabilities.



TEMPEST 2000

1994 • ATARI JAGUAR

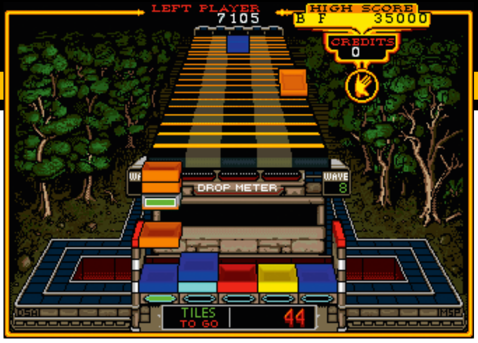
■ It was difficult to imagine how the original *Tempest* could be bettered, but this update was faster, wilder and even more hypnotic. To this day it looks absolutely amazing and sounds even better. The best Jaguar game by a long stretch.



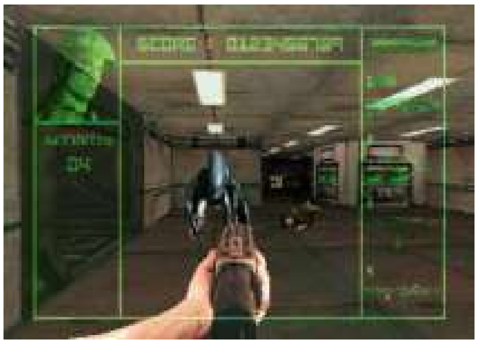
PRIMAL RAGE

1994 • ARCADE

■ Riding on the wave of *Jurassic Park*, this one-on-one fighter sees dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures banging heads and spilling blood. It's as daft as a brush (and knows it). Very likely the last great game from Atari's coin-op division.



» [Arcade] Atari may have lost the *Tetris* licence but it hit back with *Klax*, its own spin on the falling bricks formula.



» [Atari Jaguar] If *Alien Vs Predator* had launched alongside the Jaguar, and been followed by games of similar quality, then things might have been very different for Atari.

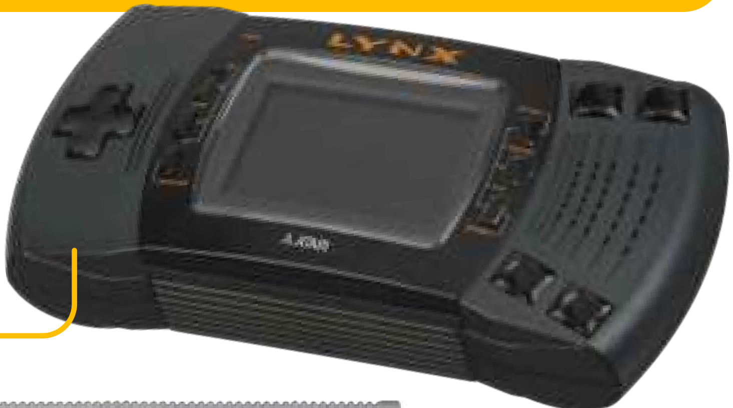
In 1996 Atari Games was sold to WMS Industries, formerly Williams and later Midway Games. Mike Hally was still involved with Atari at this point and remembers it being a successful and rewarding time – initially at least. "Atari morphed into a couple of teams creating content for the consumer/console-game industry," he tells us. "We hit a peak of success with *Area 51*, *Gauntlet Legends* and the *Rush* series. We used Midway's hardware and production facilities and it seemed like a marriage made in heaven. Our teams exploded in size and this was the start of the eventual downfall of Atari Games. Time frames and costs expanded in a bad way and we got caught in a battle of which teams Midway would keep as its profits fell. We were the step child so Midway ended our employment."

Mike volunteered to stay on as part of a ten-man 'deconstruction team'. "We had the ominous task of dealing with all the archives we still had from the beginning of Atari. I considered myself a glorified janitor with a mission like no other. It was a ton of work and I took it seriously, making sure things were done the correct way. We saved what we could and moved everything else to its final resting place. I was proud to be a part of that special team and it was a very interesting last day for sure." After more than 20 years with the business, this was a bittersweet moment for Mike. "Atari was such a fun place to call work. We grew up as a family and that made it very special. We were proud of the work we did and loved to tell everyone we worked at Atari – the greatest company on Earth!"

The final arcade game to carry the Atari Games name was *San Francisco Rush 2049*, released in October 1999. But this would not be the end for Atari… ▶

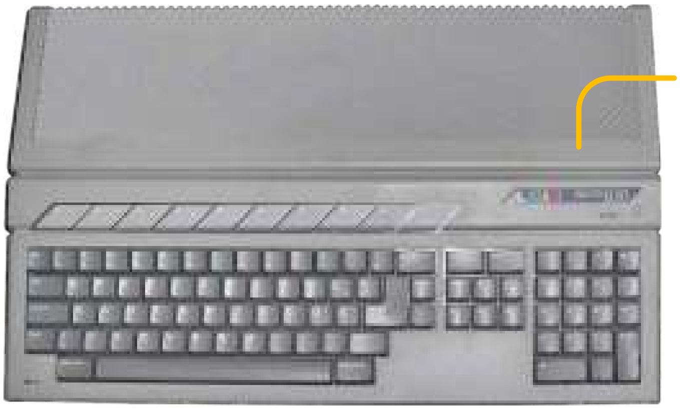
DEFINING SYSTEMS

ATARI LYNX II 1991



■ This revised model addressed two key complaints about the original: it was smaller (and lighter) and its battery life was slightly improved. It also featured a better display and a number of other sensible improvements.

ATARI FALCON 1992



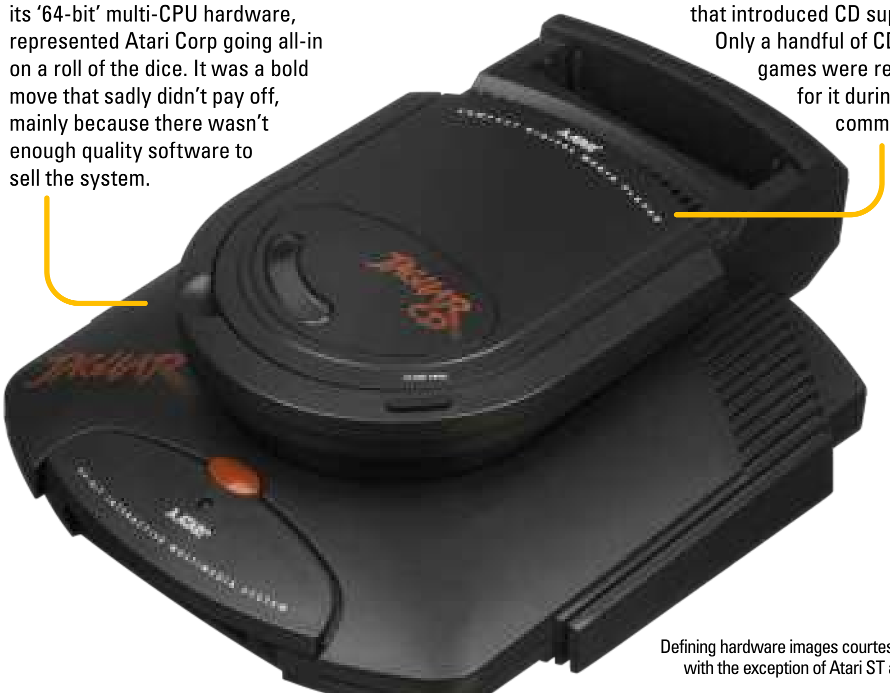
■ The Falcon was the last of the ST line and the final computer that Atari Corp released. Unsurprisingly it was the most powerful system yet. Equally unsurprisingly, it barely made a ripple and was discontinued after a year. Photo credit: LosHawlos bit.ly/falconinfo

ATARI JAGUAR 1993

■ The all-powerful Jaguar, with its '64-bit' multi-CPU hardware, represented Atari Corp going all-in on a roll of the dice. It was a bold move that sadly didn't pay off, mainly because there wasn't enough quality software to sell the system.

ATARI JAGUAR CD 1995

■ When it perhaps should have been concentrating on new cartridge software, Atari put out this hardware add-on that introduced CD support. Only a handful of CD-ROM games were released for it during its short commercial life.



Defining hardware images courtesy of Evan Amos with the exception of Atari ST and Atari Falcon

THE NOUGHTIES+

THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM SAW ATARI CHARTERING STORMY WATERS AND IT DIDN'T ALWAYS NAVIGATE THEM SUCCESSFULLY. NOW, HAVING WEATHERED MORE THAN ONE STORM, ATARI HAS A NEW CAPTAIN, WHO AIMS TO STEER THE SHIP TOWARDS NEW SEAS. CEO WADE ROSEN LOOKS FORWARD AND ASTERN

At the start of the new Millennium, Atari seemed a little lost. During the previous decade, it had exited the arcade, computer and console markets, fields it had helped to define, and under the ownership of Hasbro it appeared that Atari would become little more than a nostalgia brand, applied exclusively to retro remakes like the PlayStation editions of *Pong* and *Centipede*. Hasbro wasn't doing well in the games market though, and by 2001 it was looking to off-load its interactive entertainment division – a move which would result in a return to prominence for the Atari brand.

The buyer was the French publisher Infogrames, which was snapping up companies left and right in an ambitious attempt to become the biggest games company in the world. It had already swallowed up Ocean Software, Gremlin Interactive, Accolade and GT Interactive, and its latest purchase gave it the rights to both the Microprose and Atari brands, and their respective software libraries. Despite being the third-biggest game publisher in the world by 2002, after only EA and Vivendi, Infogrames wasn't a name that had a great deal of prestige, so after testing the waters with a trio of Atari-branded extreme sports games in 2002, the company decided to fully rebrand as Atari in 2003.

> "PEOPLE HAVE MEMORIES AND EMOTIONS TIED TO ATARI THAT PREDATE ME BY DECADES"
> **WADE ROSEN**

» Since 2004, the plug-and-play Flashback devices have brought classic 2600 games back into the home.

The result was that the famous logo did grace some decent releases in the Noughties and Teenies, and Atari was once again taking in hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue. On the surface, it looked to be a remarkable comeback, but things were not so rosy behind the scenes. Infogrames had racked up enormous debts during its acquisition spree, and hadn't posted a profit since the turn of the Millennium. By 2006, it was losing huge amounts of money and selling off major game properties like *Driver* and *Civilization* just to stave off bankruptcy. It also decided to sell off all of its internal development studios, including Shiny Entertainment – a company it had acquired for $47 million in 2002.

So while the first big name in videogames had returned, a name was all it really was – one that was attached to some major games, but with most of them having been licensed or acquired, they didn't feel like a part of the Atari heritage. What was worse was that the big names were beginning to slip from Atari's grasp, meaning that it couldn't capitalise on the successes it had managed to achieve, and without any development studios of its own it

DEFINING GAMES OF THE NOUGHTIES+

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

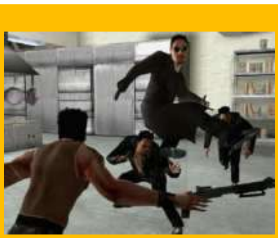
2002 • PC

■ Bioware's classic *Dungeons & Dragons* RPG gained the Atari name after the original publisher, Interplay, ran into issues. Widespread critical acclaim ensured that it was a sales success, despite a high initial asking price. Beamdog has since released HD versions.

STUNTMAN

2002 • PLAYSTATION 2

■ Released under the Atari banner in the wake of the Infogrames takeover, this third-person driving game by Reflections Interactive drew on the rich history of cinematic car chases to offer thrills but rather too many spills. The stunt construction mode was very prescient, though.



ENTER THE MATRIX

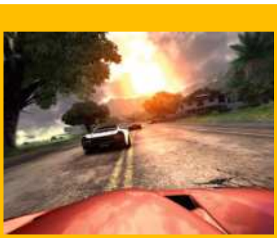
2003 • VARIOUS

■ Based on a major film licence, hugely hyped in the press, a rushed development schedule and a thoroughly disappointing, critically panned end product which still sold in its millions – this was very much the *ET* of its day. Even being directed by the Wachowskis couldn't save it.

TRANSFORMERS

2004 • PLAYSTATION 2

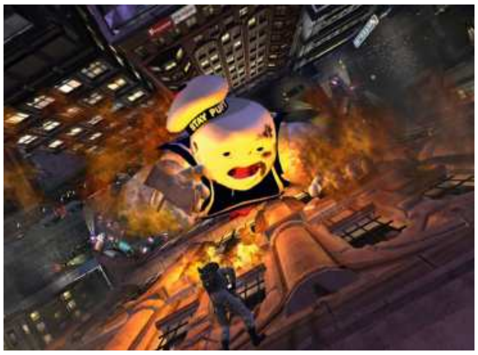
■ If you ignored this Atari Melbourne House PS2 title, assuming it must be a lazy licence knocked out for gullible pre-teens, you really messed up. *Transformers* is a truly brilliant take on the venerable source material, with much free-roaming and robot morphing.



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

2006 • VARIOUS

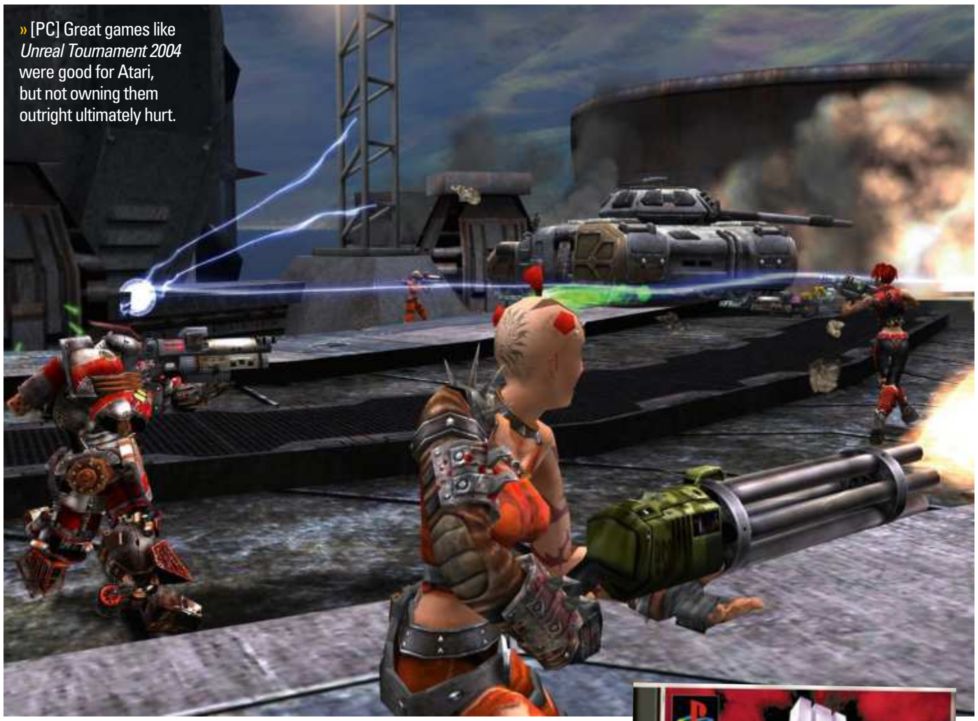
■ Long before open-world reboots became a cliché, this racer adopted the formula to revitalise a classic series after years of middling entries. The Xbox 360 version was particularly impressive in that console's early life. Numerous sequels followed.



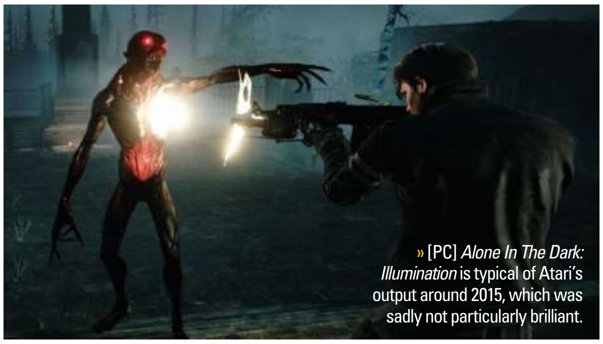
» [PS3] Atari published the excellent *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* in the US in 2009.

couldn't create new hits that it could bank on in years to come. Meanwhile the company's back catalogue sat largely ignored, and though the cute and convenient Flashback plug-and-play consoles were pleasant reminders of past glories, it often felt like the people managing the brand held it in less esteem than the gamers who had grown up with it.

Towards the end of the decade it had become clear that as a publisher, Atari was not in the same league as the likes of EA, Ubisoft and Activision – the latter a publisher it had unsuccessfully tried to strangle at birth. As a result, the cash-strapped company began to pivot towards projects with lower budgets, and Atari's classic games finally came to the fore again as their timeless gameplay would provide ample inspiration for these releases. On the HD consoles, remakes of *Yar's Revenge*, *Star Raiders*, *Haunted House* and *Warlords* were released as download-only games, while *Centipede: Infestation* showed up on the Wii and 3DS.



» [PC] Great games like *Unreal Tournament 2004* were good for Atari, but not owning them outright ultimately hurt.



» [PC] *Alone In The Dark: Illumination* is typical of Atari's output around 2015, which was sadly not particularly brilliant.

ATARI
ANNIVERSARY EDITION REDUX
PlayStation

» Atari has regularly revisited its illustrious back catalogue. This 2001 release by emulation masters Digital Eclipse includes more than a dozen arcade classics.

THE WITCHER

2007 • PC

■ Long before Andrzej Sapkowski's fantasy novels had been adapted into a massively popular Netflix series, Atari introduced gamers to Geralt Of Rivia by bringing CD Projekt Red's videogame adaptation to the market. Sequels and spinoffs have since followed.

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

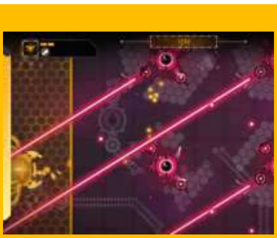
2009 • VARIOUS

■ This first-person adventure wasn't just a solid follow-up to *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*, but actually included a remaster of the cult Xbox hit. Atari rescued it when Activision dropped it.

WARLORDS

2012 • VARIOUS

■ This digital release is one of the best examples of Atari's pre-bankruptcy drive to reinvent its classics as downloadable games, building on the foundations of the multiplayer classic with new power-ups and a 3D facelift. It may look different, but the core gameplay remains intact.



YARS: RECHARGED

2022 • VARIOUS

■ The *Recharged* range boasts many fine titles and we especially enjoyed *Gravitar*, rather overlooked on its initial release in 1982, being revisited but this recent addition to the series is Wade's current favourite and who are we to argue? A great reboot of a true classic.

ATARI 50: THE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

2022 • VARIOUS

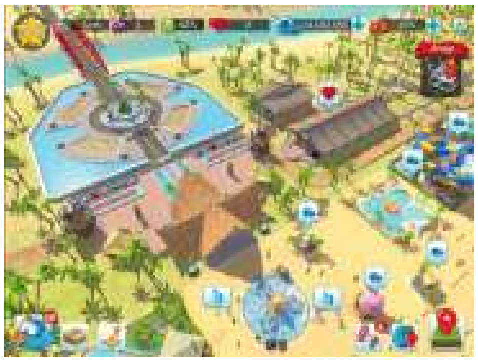
■ With half a century of games to draw from, this collection of over 100 titles not only includes the classics you'd expect, but a wealth of archive material, developer interviews and new games based on old IP.

This change in direction wasn't enough to turn around the debt-laden publisher, and in 2013 the company filed for bankruptcy. The Atari brand and its associated classic properties went up for auction for a comparatively low minimum bid of $15 million, with its most valuable single property being *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, which could be yours for a starting bid of $3.5 million. The entire *Battlezone* franchise started at $250,000, and was eventually bought by Rebellion. When Atari eventually emerged from bankruptcy under the leadership of Frédéric Chesnais, it had $34 million in debt, $1 million in revenue and employed just ten people.

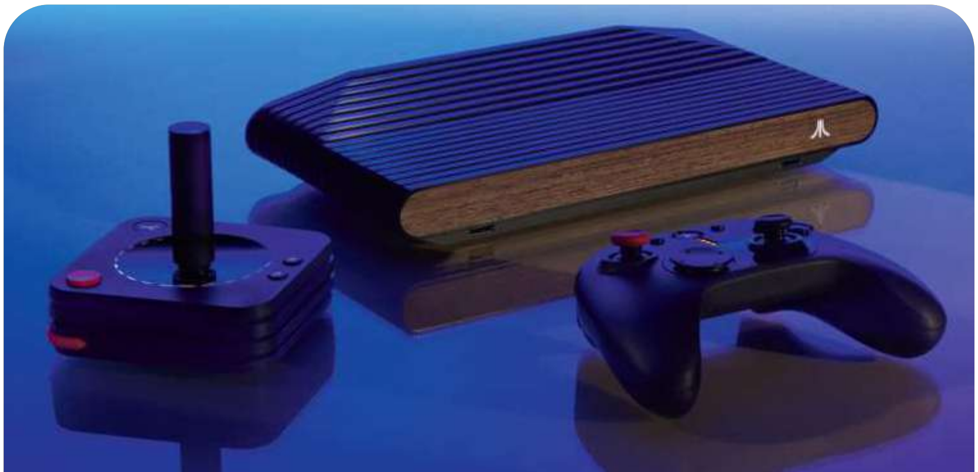
His turnaround strategy saw the company pivot towards casino games, downloadable games, mobile games and brand licensing. Unfortunately, PC games like *Haunted House: Cryptic Graves*, *Alone In The Dark: Illumination* and *Rollercoaster Tycoon World* were released to extremely poor critical reception, while efforts in the console space were limited to some *Atari Flashback* compilations and *Tempest 4000*. Many of the company's mobile releases from this period, like *Foodgod's Food Truck Frenzy*, *Lunar Battle* and *Goon Squad*, have already disappeared from the market.

Despite this, by 2020 Atari was debt-free, had grown its revenues to over $20 million and become profitable. Some of this was down to the success of mobile games like *RollerCoaster Tycoon Touch*, which had 30 million downloads. This was also in part because the sale of assets continued throughout the decade, with many of its previously acquired properties such as *Test Drive* and *Alone In The Dark* eventually finding new homes. Atari's own legacy was left intact, but outside of the odd release like the unexpected mobile release of *Ninja Golf*, it still didn't feel like that legacy meant a great deal to its owners.

That has changed. "You have this amazing history and IP and we can look at it and say, 'What do we want to do that pays respect to the past but is innovative and new?'" enthuses Wade Rosen, who became Atari's CEO in April,



» [iOS] *RollerCoaster Tycoon Touch* is one of Atari's most successful mobile games, and has been active for five years now.



THE ATARI VCS, REBORN

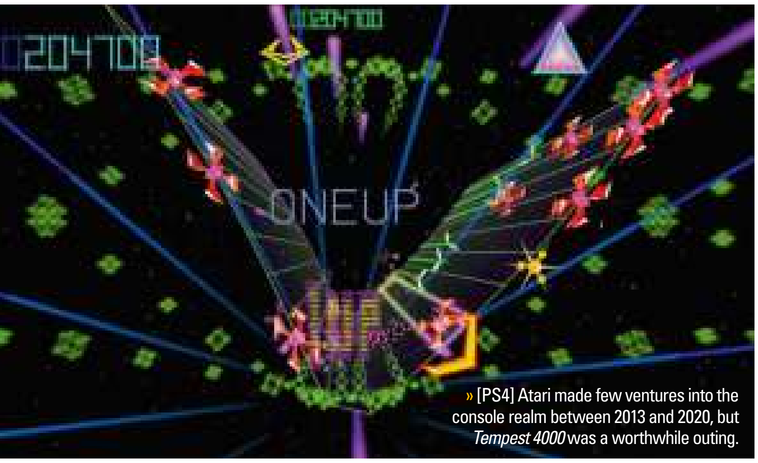
For retro gamers, the biggest selling point of the new Atari VCS, released in 2021, is the look – it closely resembles its Seventies forebear, woodgrain effect and all. Beneath that nostalgic exterior is a modern PC running a Linux-based operating system, meaning you can play games compatible with Windows 10 – though there are numerous other cheaper and more convenient ways to do this. It will also run many classic Atari titles, available to buy through its online store, and includes access to Antstream, meaning you can stream a vast range of old games. It's not cheap at $399 but if you paid over £200 for the Lego Atari 2600 set, perhaps you can justify the outlay for something that will undoubtedly look cool under your telly.

HAVE YOU STAYED ATARI TODAY?

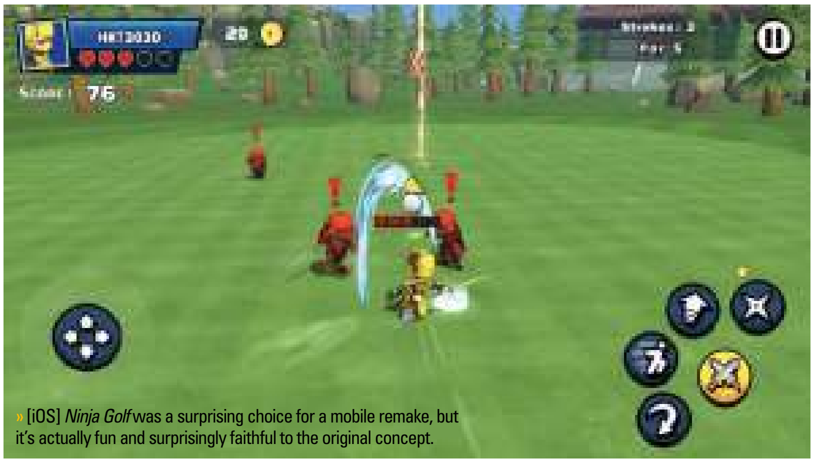
One of the more unusual ventures announced by Atari in recent years was the Atari Hotels project. According to the announcement in 2020, the hotels were to offer a "unique hospitality experience inspired by, and built with, classic and modern video game culture in mind", with the facilities at the initial Las Vegas and Phoenix locations including retro-style arcades, themed restaurants and bars. Further locations in Dubai, Spain and Gibraltar were announced in partnership with ICICB Group, but with Atari ending its partnerships with ICICB in April 2022, it appears as though anyone dreaming of staying in Room 2600 will have to put that particular fantasy on hold.

ATARI
HOTELS

ASTEROIDS
SIM RACING

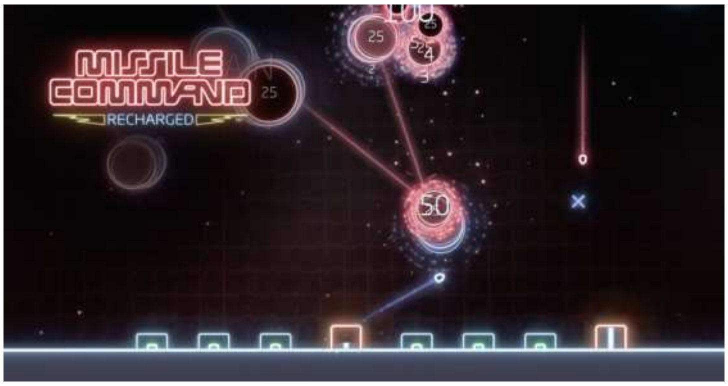


» [PS4] Atari made few ventures into the console realm between 2013 and 2020, but *Tempest 4000* was a worthwhile outing.



» [iOS] *Ninja Golf* was a surprising choice for a mobile remake, but it's actually fun and surprisingly faithful to the original concept.

» Atari's past and present together – Wade Rosen and Nolan Bushnell meet up in Malibu.



» [PC] *Missile Command: Recharged*, the first entry in the growing *Recharged* range, is a reimagining of Dave Theurer's original nuclear nightmare.

2021. "Can we make amazing games you can jump into instantly, that 'easy to learn, difficult to master' Atari ethos? Absolutely. Can we make innovative hardware that plays into that retro space? That's our hope."

Despite being born in 1985, Wade is a dedicated retro gamer. His office is adorned with a plethora of Atari titles and memorabilia, along with rows of Saturn and Dreamcast games, and there is a hulking old CRT television sat on his desk – and lying next to it is a copy of **Retro Gamer**. "I've been a subscriber for a long time. I love it. I've learned a lot from **Retro Gamer**."

Wade's introduction to Atari's rich history began in the early Nineties, when as a child he played *Centipede*, *Missile Command*, *Asteroids* and *Tempest*, pre-installed on the family PC. His love for those arcade classics has not dimmed and he speaks with real passion about Atari's *Recharged* range, how much he enjoys playing the recently updated *Yars' Revenge* and how he would like to see *Miner 2049er* given similar treatment. He also embraces how much the brand, crystallised in that enduring logo, means to gamers. "People have memories and emotions tied to Atari that predate me by decades," he says, "and that logo is iconic for a reason. It's easy to draw and instantly recognisable. It's beautiful, timeless and encapsulates what we want Atari to be – of the past but also of the future. Nostalgic futurism!"

For all his wide-eyed optimism about games, Wade is a seasoned realist when it comes to business, having gained a wealth of experience in numerous ventures, built on an impressive educational foundation. He acknowledges it would be naïve to think Atari can directly compete with the Xboxes and PlayStations of this world but senses there are always opportunities in the tech sphere. "We can be the best at the niches we play in," he says. "We can push innovation in certain areas of hardware and particularly with up-and-coming tech. Like VR – there are not so many established rules and the budgets haven't ballooned to hundreds of millions of dollars. Much of my background is in start-ups and people don't realise how much more in common Atari has with a small, rapidly growing tech company rather than a well-established brand. We're the oldest start-up!"

> "WE WANT ATARI TO BE OF THE PAST BUT ALSO OF THE FUTURE. NOSTALGIC FUTURISM!"
> **WADE ROSEN**

As this venerable company with a young man at its head celebrates its first 50 years, we end our conversation by looking far into the distance. We cheekily read out the advice offered to Wade by founder Nolan Bushnell, quoted in full at the start of this article, about trying to be 'revolutionary rather than evolutionary' and wonder if he agrees? "I do, on a fundamental level, but we do need to do some things that are evolutionary. That gives you a solid base and keeps the lights on, so everyone knows they can show up the next day and that's not always been the case with Atari," he says with a wry smile. "At the same time, though, you have to make revolutionary bets, and those are in the industries that are up and coming, where the rules are still being written."

So, does Wade think one day we might be marking Atari's 100th anniversary? And if so, what might we be celebrating? He pauses, perhaps mulling what the world and indeed himself might look like in 2072, and then a broad grin spreads across his face. "I'd love it if we were celebrating a company that had a successful second act. That would be amazing. The story of Atari is often 'the rise and fall' which isn't fair because lots of what Atari did post-1983 was incredibly innovative, particularly in the computer division and with the Lynx. But that arc of Atari… I'd love it if we looked back and saw this as the start of the next rise, the next wave. I hope I'm here for it, to see what Atari has become… though I hope I'm not still running it in 50 years. No one deserves that!" *

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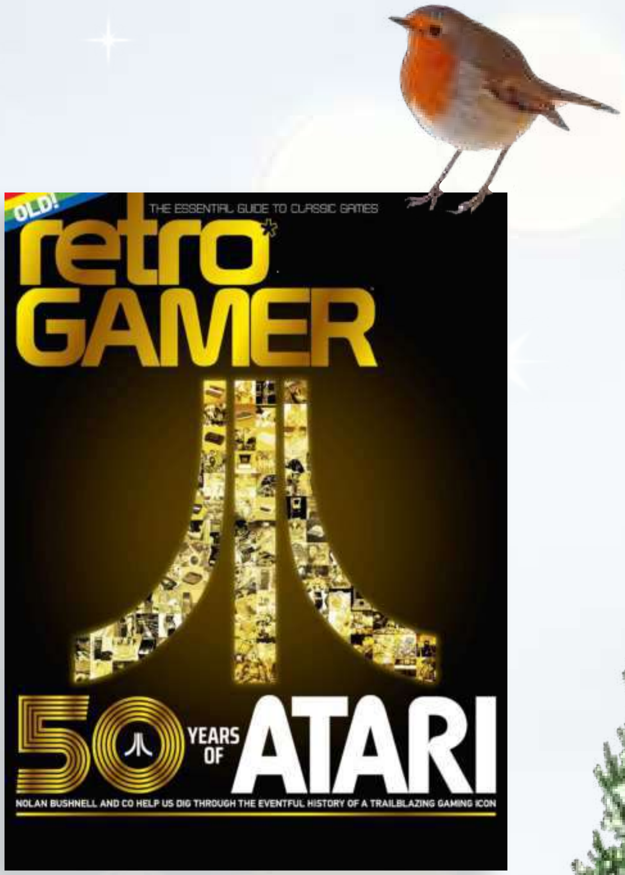
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THE MAKING OF

ATARI® 50

THE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

VIDEOGAMES WOULDN'T BE WHAT THEY ARE TODAY WITHOUT ATARI, SO CELEBRATING ITS LEGACY IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. WE SPEAK TO THE TEAM AT DIGITAL ECLIPSE TO DISCOVER HOW IT HAS REIMAGINED ITS APPROACH TO THE RETRO COMPILATION TO DO JUST THAT

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

PS5
ATARI 50
16

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI

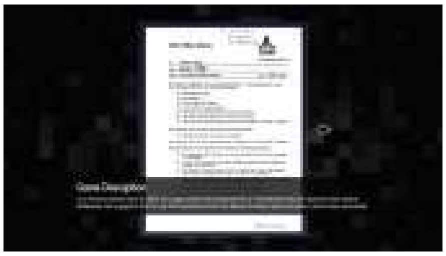
» **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE

» **RELEASED:** 2022

» **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS

» **GENRE:** COMPILATION

Can a task be both a dream job and a nightmare job at the same time? We think so, and if anything comes close, it has to be putting together an Atari compilation. On one hand, you have an incredibly rich and interesting history to work with, but on the other you're being judged against past compilation efforts going back decades. Even for Digital Eclipse, the team behind some of the best retro releases in recent years, it has to be a daunting task. Stephen Frost, the producer of *Atari 50*, admits as much. "We knew going into this project that a lot of the games that we would need/want to include (mainly 2600 titles) had already been released in several past collections," he tells us. "We also felt that an important goal for this project, given the 50th anniversary of Atari, would be to tell the story of the company and how its games and hardware releases influenced both the arcade and videogame industries, especially for those who did not grow up in that era."



Such lofty ambitions necessitated a new approach to the concept of a retro-gaming compilation. "Since the dawn of time, retro-game collections have generally followed the same formula: over here is the list of games, and over here is the museum where we dump all the bonus content," says Chris Kohler, who worked on the editorial direction of the compilation. "We've been trying to play around with that formula with our previous releases, and *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration* presented an opportunity to try something radically different: what if the games, videos, historical content and trivia were all in the same place, all presented in context?"

From this line of thinking, Digital Eclipse came up with the core concept of the interactive timeline, a feature which presents text, images, video content and playable games as part of an ongoing narrative. "I think *Atari 50* is a great test bed for this concept considering that we're looking at decades' worth of games here, from *Pong* in 1972 to *Fight For Life* in 1996, and even beyond that to homebrew games made later," says Chris. "When you're casting such a wide net you have to contextualise everything, let the player know what they're looking at and where it fits into history, why it was made, why it came out the way it did." The goal here is to create something akin to a playable museum exhibit.

As well as many hours of interview footage – see the Vintage Video boxout for more on that – Digital Eclipse gathered materials from The Strong, the National Videogame Museum and the Museum Of Videogame Art, as well as private collectors. The team had a tight deadline to work to, but fortunately also had plenty to work with. "There is no shortage of Atari material to draw from! We could have included a hundred times what's already in *Atari 50* – it was more of a task of whittling things down and deciding what was most important and what helped us tell the story," says Chris.

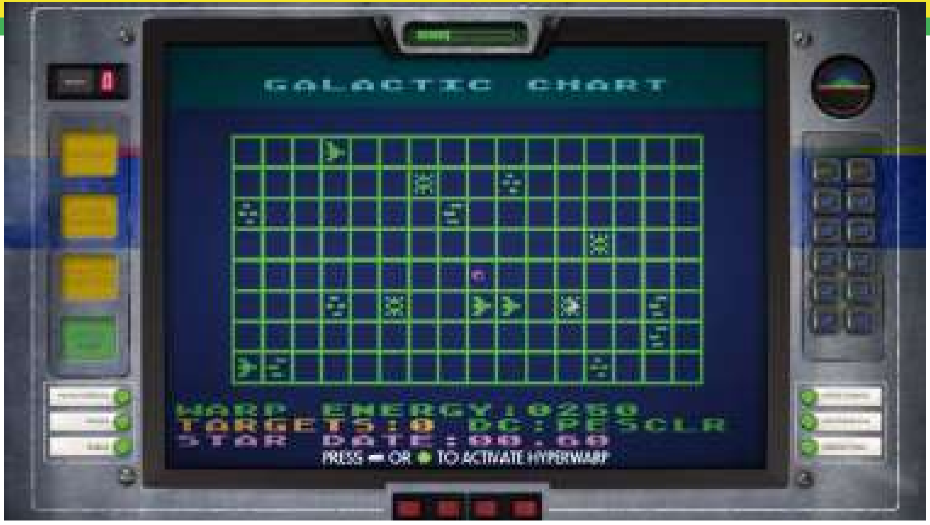
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PHANTASY STAR COLLECTION (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE
YEAR: 2002

SNK 40TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION
SYSTEM: SWITCH, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2018

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COWABUNGA COLLECTION
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2022

» [PC] There's a CRT effect available for most games, and LCD simulation for the Lynx titles.



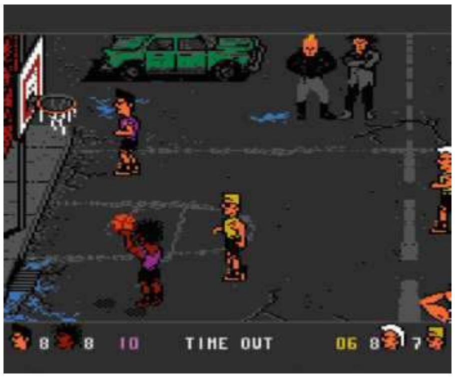
» [PC] *Star Raiders* has a new animated wallpaper that shows you your ship's status indicators.

BIRTH OF THE CONSOLE
"It Sucked": Designing Yars' Revenge

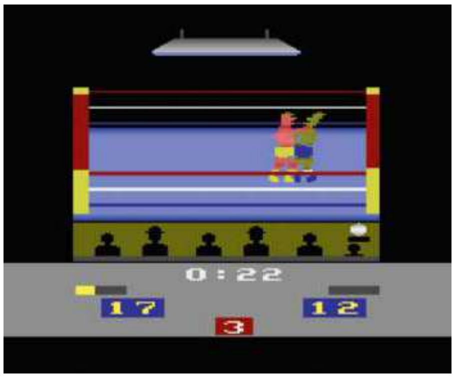
» [PC] Interview content should be full and frank, as Atari hasn't said no to anything.

THE 1990S AND BEYOND
Fatal Run (Atari 2600)

» [PC] Here's some context explaining *Fatal Run*'s status as a late release for the Atari 2600.



» [Atari 7800] If you love basketball and violence, *Basketbrawl* should be right up your street.



» [Atari 2600] *RealSports Boxing* is a fast and frantic punch-'em-up from the later Atari 2600 era.

» [PC] Even projects that were never released have found a home in *Atari 50*.

JUST AS YOU REIMAGINED THEM

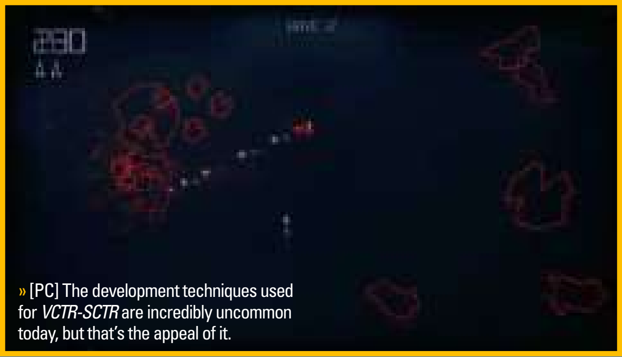
A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF SOME OF ATARI 50'S BRAND-NEW GAMES

One of the major features of *Atari 50* is its brand-new games, under the Atari Reimagined label. These are *Haunted House*, *Neo Breakout*, *Quadratank*, *Swordquest: AirWorld*, *VCTR-SCTR* and *Yars' Revenge Reimagined*.

Swordquest: AirWorld is an attempt to create the missing chapter of the Eighties Atari 2600 adventure series, which was infamous for its offer of major prizes. "We knew that the original plan was to base *AirWorld* on the *I Ching* and we had some information from Tod Frye that gave us a rough idea of his vision. We also knew that Atari was planning to create another comic book for *AirWorld* but that was something we could not do. So the approach we took was to dive deep into research on *I Ching*," says Dave Rees. "The one thing that stood out in our research right away was the *I Ching* hexagram grid. The rooms in *AirWorld* are arranged identically to the grid, and we also included the grid in the manual as a reference, which can be viewed while playing for convenience. In the end, it fit perfectly with the approach of the previous games and once we had it in place, it really felt like a *Swordquest* game."

Yars' Revenge Reimagined takes a different approach, overhauling the original Atari 2600 classic. "When you play *Yars' Revenge Reimagined*, you're playing the actual Atari 2600 version of *Yars' Revenge*. The original game performed some amazing feats to draw everything on-screen, but under the hood is an elaborate system that had far more information than what the Atari could display," explains Mike Mika. "Once I realised that, I started to place hooks into the code to capture coordinates for the player, the enemies and the playfield. When that first version of the new display came to life, I was blown away with how smooth and intricate the gameplay felt. It played like a modern game! After that, I added more effects and audio while still letting the original game drive all of it."

VCTR-SCTR is a completely new game, inspired by the vector graphics classics of old. "The guiding rule was, 'No sprites!' Everything on-screen is composed of individually rendered lines, all calculated in real-time. They flicker, judder and glow in dynamic ways to give them the look of classic vectors," says programmer Jeremy Williams. "The 3D game phases were particularly challenging. To maintain the look, we didn't want the GPU to handle any of the 3D rendering so I wrote my own software 3D renderer using techniques that nobody has had to think about for decades. I even wrote an in-game 3D modeller that let us place vertices in 3D space and connect pairs to form wireframes. The whole exercise was one of the most-enlightening parts of the project for me, and exponentially increased my appreciation for what Atari accomplished 40+ years ago using far less powerful tools."



» [PC] The development techniques used for *VCTR-SCTR* are incredibly uncommon today, but that's the appeal of it.

Jerry Jessop
Former Atari Engineer

VINTAGE VIDEO

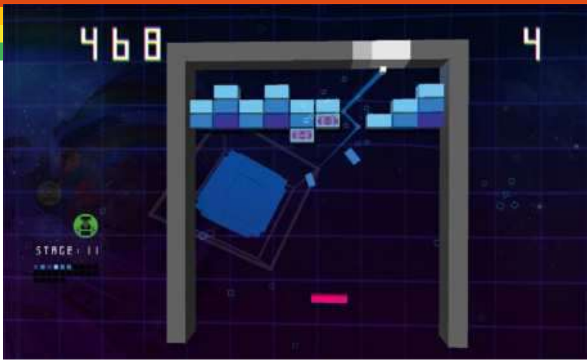
DREW SCANLON EXPLAINS THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF PUTTING TOGETHER ATARI 50'S VIDEO CONTENT

■ One of the key aspects of the interactive timeline presentation is a generous helping of video footage, helping to tie together Atari's story. As you'd expect, some of that is historical footage. "Rather than pulling videos off the internet, all archive footage we use in the game was captured from original sources. Hans Reutter (AKA SeattleRetroGuy) provided us with some excellent tape transfers of Atari commercials from the home-computer era, as well as a film scan of the legendary Atari ad 'The Fly' which ran in movie theatres," says Drew Scanlon. "Additionally, our editorial team tracked down a rare interview with Nolan Bushnell conducted by journalism students at UC Berkeley in 1973 that shows, among other things, *Pong* arcade machines on the assembly line. That film scan was graciously provided to us by the Atari Museum."

However, the big draw is the new interviews. "Being able to hear the stories from the people who were there was really important to us, so we tried from the beginning to have as many of those voices as possible included in the videos," says Drew. Though the editorial team were able to track down a number of interview subjects, more still came as part of the interview process. "After the interviews, they would ask, 'Have you talked to so-and-so? They'd be great for this. I'll give you their email.' This was invaluable, and contributed greatly to the breadth and quality of what we were able to achieve." Ten former Atari employees are interviewed, including Al Alcorn, Owen Rubin, David Crane, Jerry Jessop and Bill Rehbock, as well as other industry veterans including Cliff Bleszinski, Tim Schafer and Ed Fries. Notably, current Atari CEO Wade Rosen conducts an interview with Atari's original CEO, Nolan Bushnell.

In the same way as the game list evolved over the course of development, the story told in video only became clear through filming. "We had to assess the interviews as a whole before deciding what topics we were going to focus on," Drew explains. "A few central events and themes stood out, so we focussed on those first before going back and filling in gaps in the narrative." It should be an unflinching look, as Atari told the Digital Eclipse team that nothing is off-limits, and Drew cites a video titled 'Did They Do Drugs At Atari?' as one of his favourites. "But in general, I'm just excited for players to get to know the people behind these games," he concludes. "To do the work they did required some pretty amazing abilities, and I think any fan of videogames deserves to hear from the funny, creative, quirky, passionate folks that launched a new artistic medium."

CRANE: If you're making an arcade game, it begins as a hardware project.
Garry Kitchen
Programmer, Keystone Kapers
David Crane
Programmer, Pitfall!

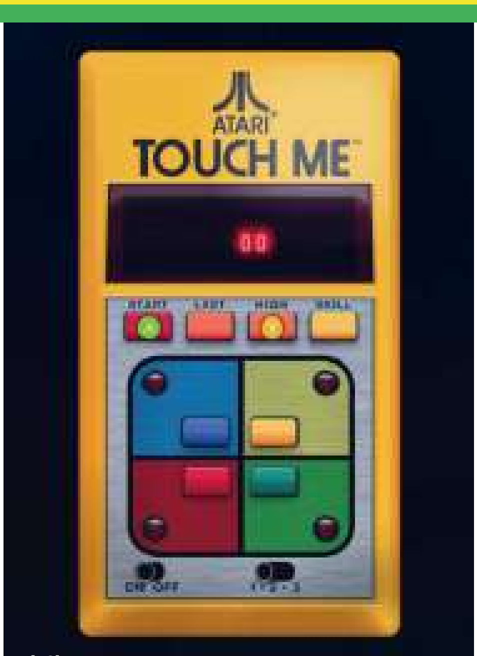


"Let's go back to our roots.
Let's do at least one more game system."

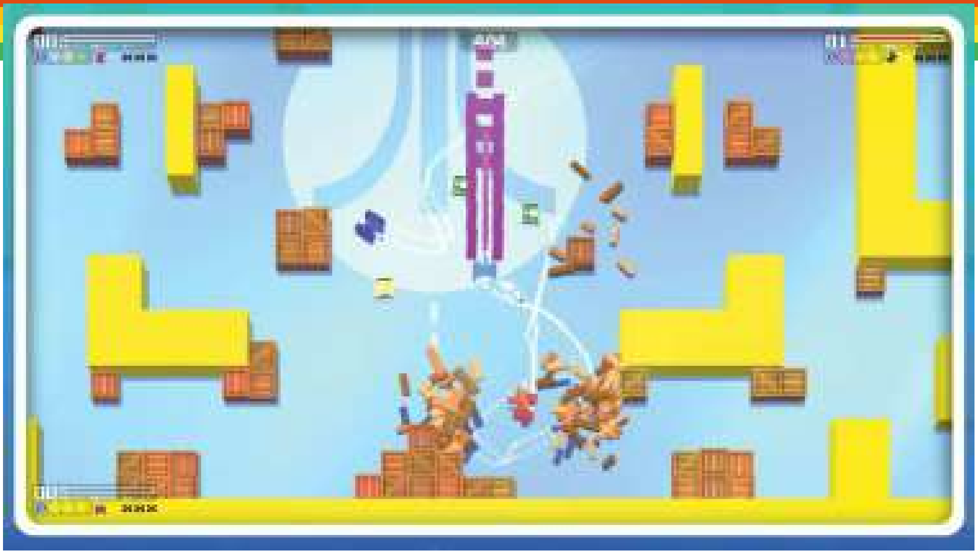
▶ That wasn't the only area that needed some whittling down. "Ultimately people don't want to sit in front of their television screens and read a book," says Chris. "Fortunately I began my career writing 70-word game reviews that appeared in tiny squares in *Wired* magazine, so I got some experience in brutally cutting word counts down to maximum efficiency. Mostly it's about figuring out when to get out of the way and let the digital artefacts speak for themselves." Another editorial challenge was the battle between chronological correctness and coherency. "We get to cheat a little bit with the vertical timelines, which let us jump ahead a little bit to finish out a certain story before you go back to the main timeline," Chris explains. "This was definitely something that we had to figure out as we went along. Fortunately our engineers built a system where Dan [Amrich] and I could play with the timelines and move stuff around on our own without having to, you know, program a computer. Which would have been a disaster."

LYNX
The Atari Lynx, Redesigned

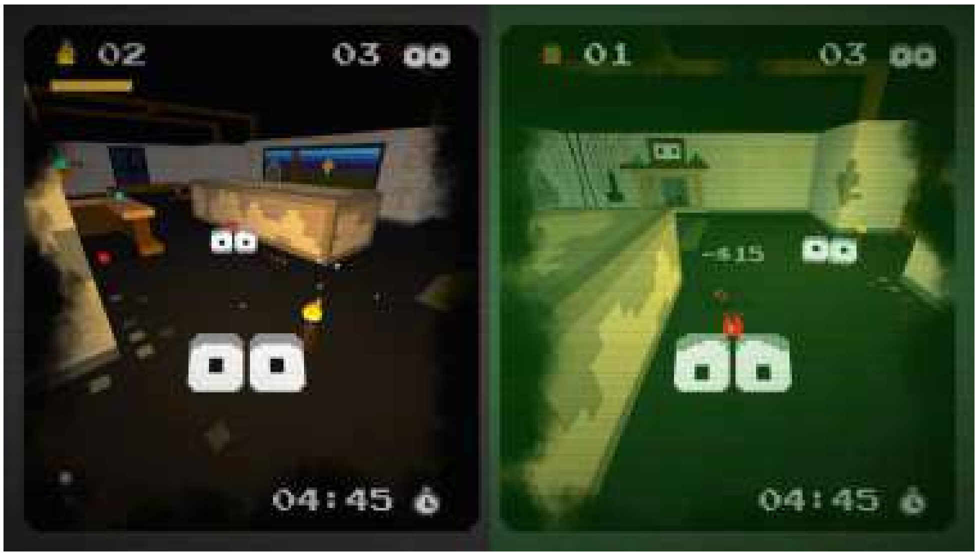
» [PC] There aren't too many Lynx games on the compilation, it has to be said. It's a shame, as it has some stunning arcade conversions.



» [PC] The dedicated handheld game *Touch Me* has been included, which is a pretty nice touch.



» [PC] New game *Quadratank* features obstacles such as ice and crates, making aiming trickier.



» [PC] Can you and a friend survive this reimagined version of *Haunted House*?

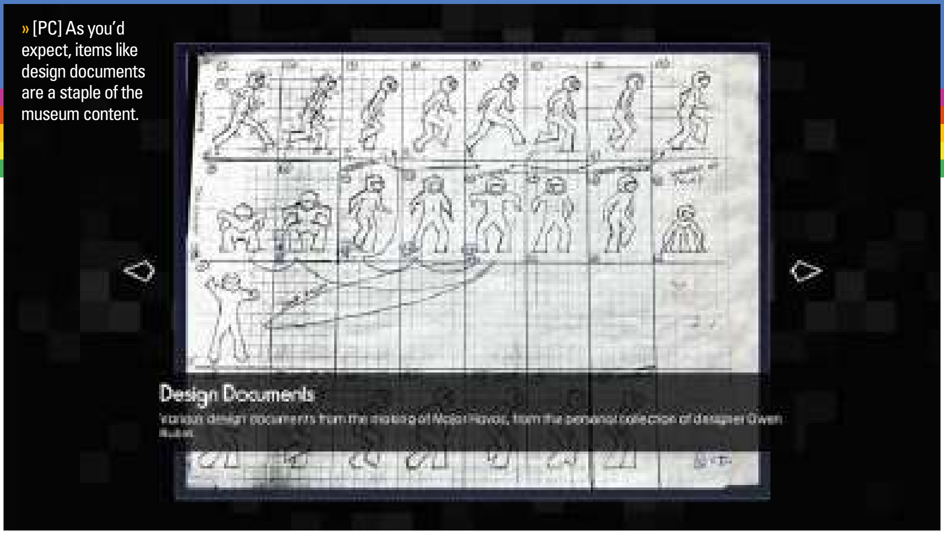
That story is decidedly focussed on the games, rather than the business side of things. "While we do talk about the changes to company culture and goals that came with the Warner acquisition and later, Jack Tramiel's time with the company, they are contextual and primarily discussed to help people understand the games themselves. We really spend the bulk of our time focussing on telling stories that might have emotional resonance with the player," says Dan Amrich. "It was important to not just tell Atari's origin stories, but also illustrate the impact Atari's legacy has had on the people within the industry that it created. Ernie Cline was thrilled to tell us how Easter eggs in Atari games directly led to the creation of *Ready Player One*."

It's a good reminder that as exciting as the presentation is, the games are the star of the show, and there are over 100 of them to get stuck into here. As with most past Atari compilations, *Atari 50* covers the familiar ground of the company's arcade games, including *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Missile Command* and the previously unreleased *Akka Arrh*, as well as the Atari 2600. Where it goes further than most past Atari compilations is that it also includes games for the Atari 5200, Atari 7800, Lynx and Jaguar, as well as the 8-bit home computers. "We are fortunate to have such a talented engineering team and emulation experts who were able to take on the Herculean task of getting six main emulators working, as well as several arcade-specific ones," says Stephen. "But it wasn't easy. That's probably why you don't see that many classic game releases feature so many emulators at one time."

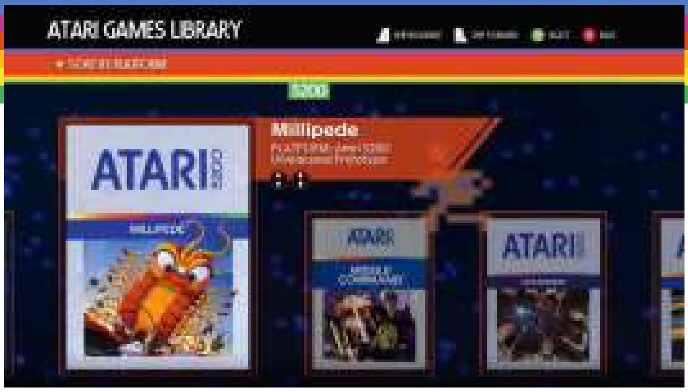
Although the Atari 2600 is well-trodden ground, emulating it properly is still no easy journey. "The 2600 emulation itself is quite solid, but there were a few games that posed some issues that required custom code. The Atari 2600 is such a unique console, particularly with how the hardware switches work," says Dave Rees, a programmer on *Atari 50*. "Not every game utilises them in the same way so we had to write some custom code to handle various scenarios. For example, the select switch was meant to act as a way of switching game types or modes. But this switch was sometimes used in unique ways for certain games. One in particular is *Secret Quest*, which uses the switch to display a code-entry status screen. This required some custom code to get it to toggle with a press of a button. So each game had to be analysed from a gameplay perspective with all switches in mind to make sure everything felt and behaved correctly."

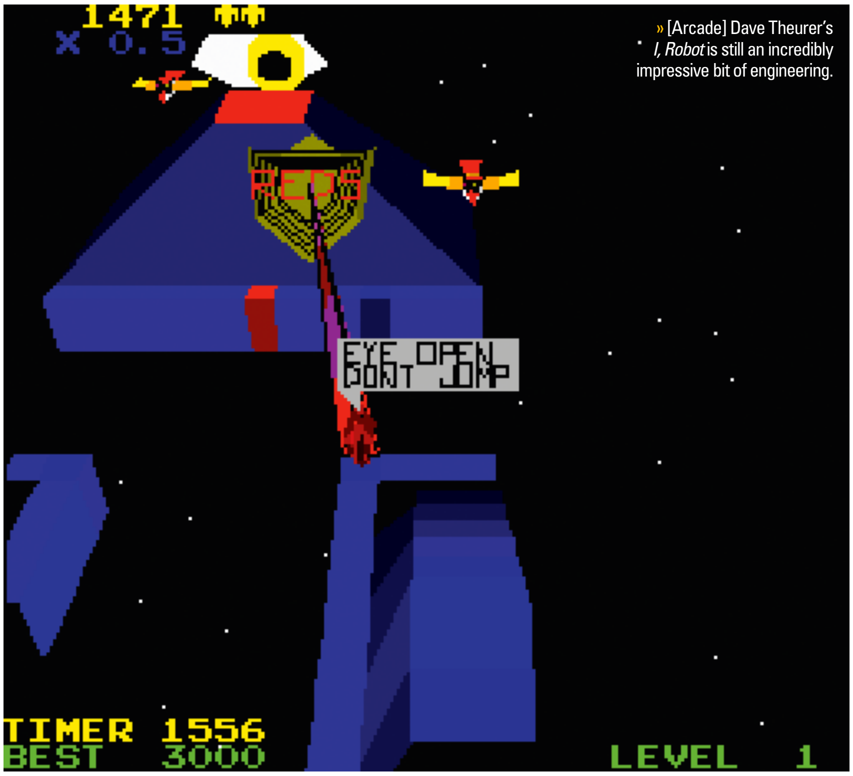
Though the other systems didn't have the same commercial success, there's still plenty to enjoy. Games like *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* and *Star Raiders* are genuine classics, while Atari 7800 games like *Ninja Golf* and *Basketbrawl* are certainly interesting oddities. Then there's the Jaguar selection, which allows you the chance to play the timeless *Tempest 2000* and rarities like *Atari Karts* and *Fight For Life*.

» [Atari Lynx] *Missile Command* shows up a few times, evolving with each new bit of hardware.

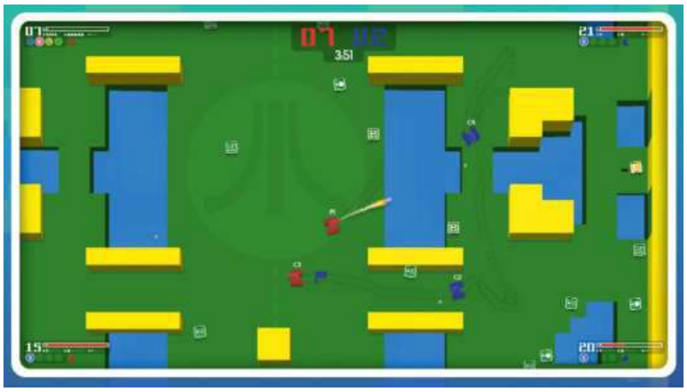


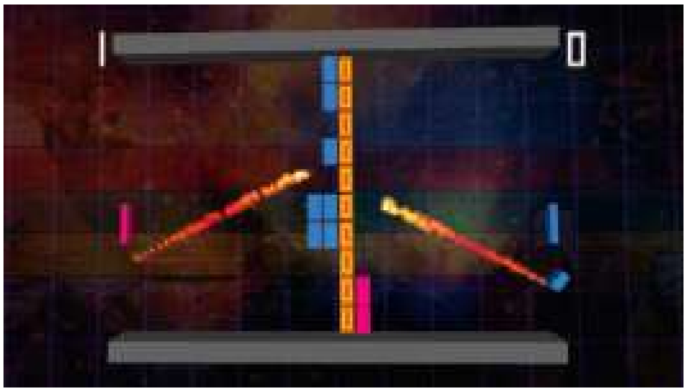
» [PC] As you'd expect, items like design documents are a staple of the museum content.





» [Arcade] Dave Theurer's *I, Robot* is still an incredibly impressive bit of engineering.





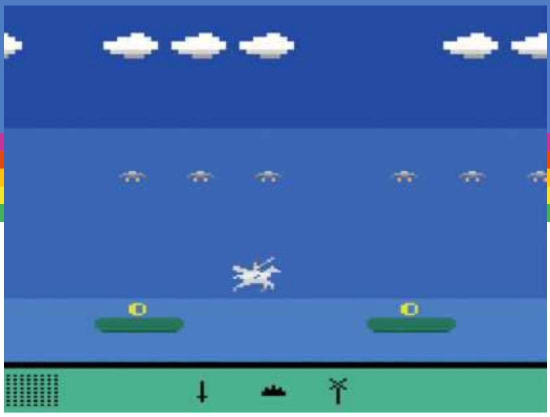
» [PC] *Neo Breakout* combines aspects of *Pong* and *Breakout* for one fierce multiplayer contest.

TURTLE POWER

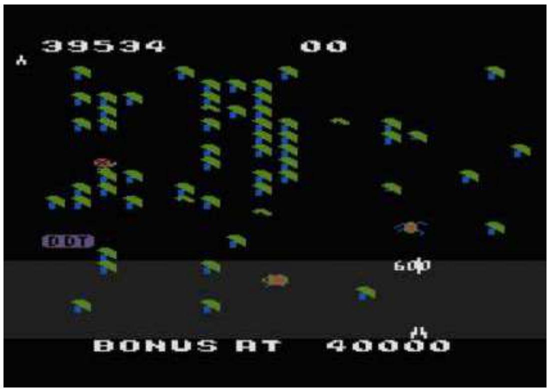
HOW DID THE INTERVIEW PROCESS WIND UP IMPACTING VCTR-SCTR?

You'd think that Digital Eclipse would know just about everything about turtles after helping to return the teenage ninja variety to our screens this year, but a one-of-a-kind *Asteroids* game proved them wrong, as Dan Amrich recalls. "When Owen Rubin – creator of Atari coin-ops like *Space Duel* and *Major Havoc* – visited our studio for his on-camera interview, we showed him our progress on *VCTR-SCTR*. When he saw the first level, inspired by *Asteroids*, he shouted, 'You gotta change the UFOs into turtles!' We had no idea what that meant," he explains.

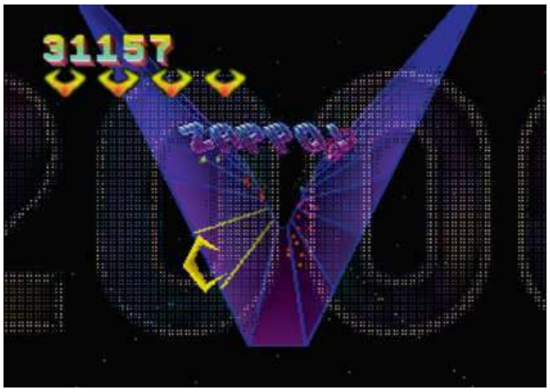
"Turns out the whole coin-op team went out to a bar one night that featured turtle races and, inspired, quickly created a prototype for a turtle-racing game. Using a microphone, players would use it to encourage their digital turtles to cross the finish line first. Too soft and the turtle wouldn't move, too loud and they'd get freaked out and not move," Dan continues. "Management saw this and hated it, promising them that turtles were now forbidden from any Atari games." Of course, Atari's programmers saw this as an opportunity for some mischief. "Around this same time, Atari manufactured its 50,000th *Asteroids* cabinet, which featured special gold accents on the control panel, side art and marquee. Since the turtle ban was still fresh, the coin-op crew created a custom board for the golden *Asteroids* machine that occasionally turned the UFO into… a turtle," Dan continues. The machine had originally been stationed at Atari headquarters, but its current whereabouts were unknown. "Midway eventually acquired the Atari Games coin-op division, and Warner Bros later acquired Midway," Dan explains. "By complete luck, a few weeks after we learned about it, a friend at Netherrealm Studios – the devs behind *Mortal Kombat* and *Injustice* – mentioned that they had an *Asteroids* machine in their break room, and it was gold! Sure enough, its markings match the one from Atari HQ, but unfortunately the board inside is no longer the custom turtle hack, and that code may now be lost forever. But at least now we know what happened to this unusual footnote to Atari's arcade success, and it's safe with developers who appreciate it."



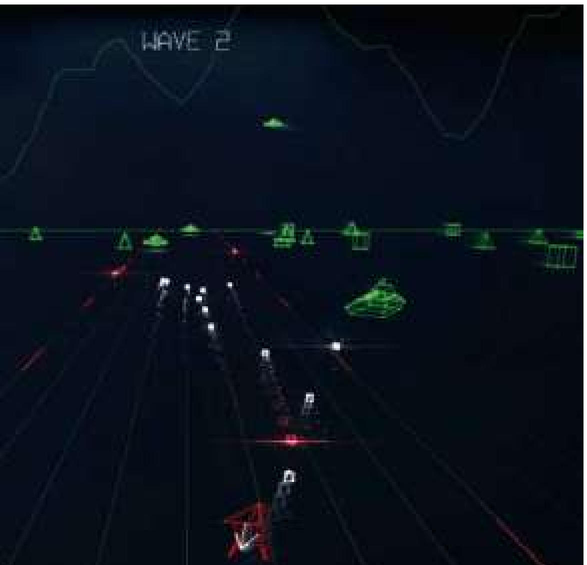
» [PC] Swordquest: AirWorld is another new game with concludes the popular Atari 2600 series.



» [Atari 5200] *Millipede* never saw an official cartridge release back in the Eighties, but it's present here.



» [Atari Jaguar] *Tempest 2000* is a chaotic classic that will melt your eyes and fry your brain.



» [PC] Is that a UFO in the sky? It had better be, if Atari is watching.

This proved to be particularly challenging for Digital Eclipse to achieve. "There is not a lot of documentation available for the [Jaguar] hardware, and the documentation that does exist has a lot of holes or inaccuracies in it," says Rich Whitehouse, who worked on the Jaguar emulator. "In addition to stepping through and debugging the differences between my emulator and the hardware, I ended up writing quite a few software tests to fill in the blanks.

"Changing the timing between processors or getting little timing details wrong (like how a RISC pipeline stall should occur) can totally break the software, often because it surfaces a bug in the original game that the developers never happened across on hardware," he continues. "That makes it harder to cut corners to achieve better native performance, and generally means that running each processor in parallel on native hardware threads will lead to a lot of instability unless you have so many sync points that you negate the performance benefit. Between those three CPUs and the other specialised components (like the Blitter and Object Processor), though, the Jaguar can get pretty expensive to emulate in software, so getting all of those titles running smooth and stable on the Switch ended up being its own challenge."

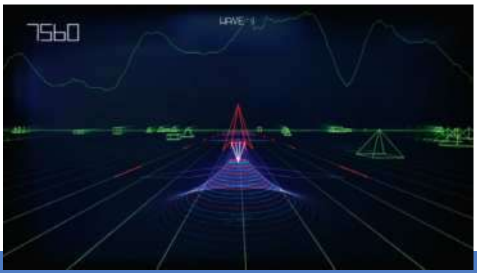
Then there are the six new *Atari Reimagined* games, which Stephen tells us were part of the plan from the beginning. "However, we initially had no idea what we were going to create or if there was a need to somehow connect the experiences together, whether it was by a theme or genre, etc. Everyone just had their own ideas on what we should make and why," he explains. "It was that individual passion that really sparked the idea of just letting the different team members go off and design their own games based upon their own interests and expertise. Obviously, the entire team would provide feedback and suggestions as progress was made on the individual games, but really, each of the games is the direct result of a single team member being given free rein to build what excited them." You can read more about those in the Just As You Reimagined Them boxout.

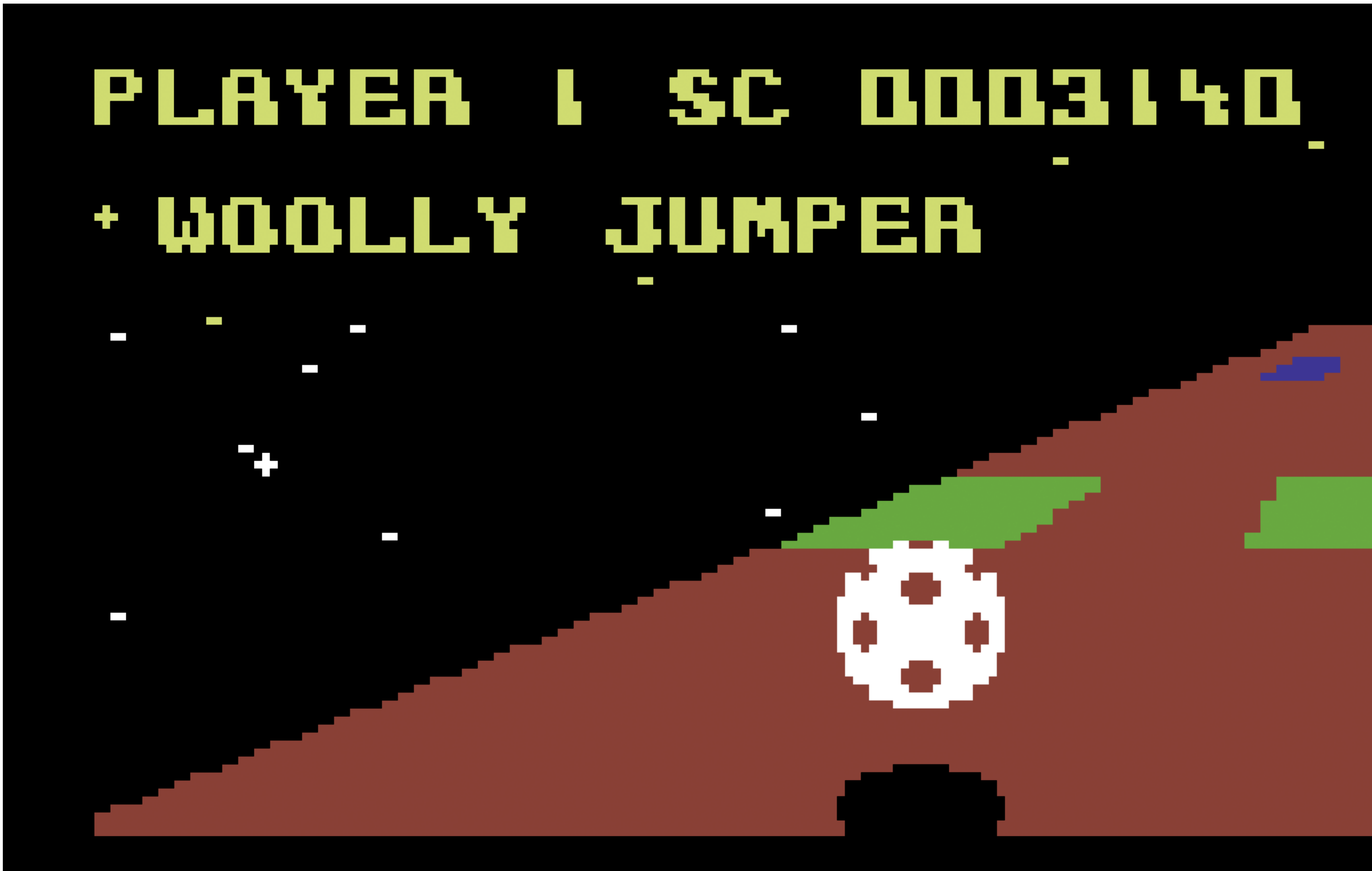
Because of the unusual nature of *Atari 50*, the approach to choosing games was also non-standard – rather than beginning with a set list, *Atari 50* evolved as the narrative aspects of the project started to take shape. Of course, putting together such a compilation is always tricky, especially when trying to represent a company with such a convoluted business history. Player expectations can be thwarted by legal realities in cases where Atari no longer owns the rights to some games, or even never owned them at all. That means you won't see the famous *Star Wars* arcade game or *Alien Vs Predator* for the Jaguar, which obviously have film licences to work with. You also won't see arcade games developed by Atari Games, like *Marble Madness*, *STUN Runner* and *San Francisco Rush* – the rights for these ended up with Warner Bros following the bankruptcy of Midway, which had previously absorbed Atari Games.

"If it were up to us, we would have definitely included more third-party titles. We even started the process on trying to get permission to include certain titles and art assets, but the complexity of figuring out who has the rights and actually getting agreements in place was such a huge time investment that we ended up just having to focus on mainly properties that Atari still clearly owned the rights to. And given the greater focus on telling Atari's history that made sense," says Stephen. "However, for the future, we would love to be able to devote the time and resources necessary to secure the rights to more third-party titles (similar to how we were able to include *Yoomp!*) and be able to fully tell their story and the role they played in Atari's early success."

The Atari ST doesn't have any playable representation either. "While some initial work on the ST emulator was started late in the project, we eventually came to the conclusion that the number of games that we would be able to include (that were not already present on other platforms) wasn't enough to justify the resources required to complete the emulator to the quality level that would have been required," says Stephen. "If we could have had more time to explore licensing additional ST titles, the effort might have been worth it, but we simply ran out of time and had to focus our efforts on other aspects of the release. We do love the ST, though, and hope to put a spotlight on that platform in the future."

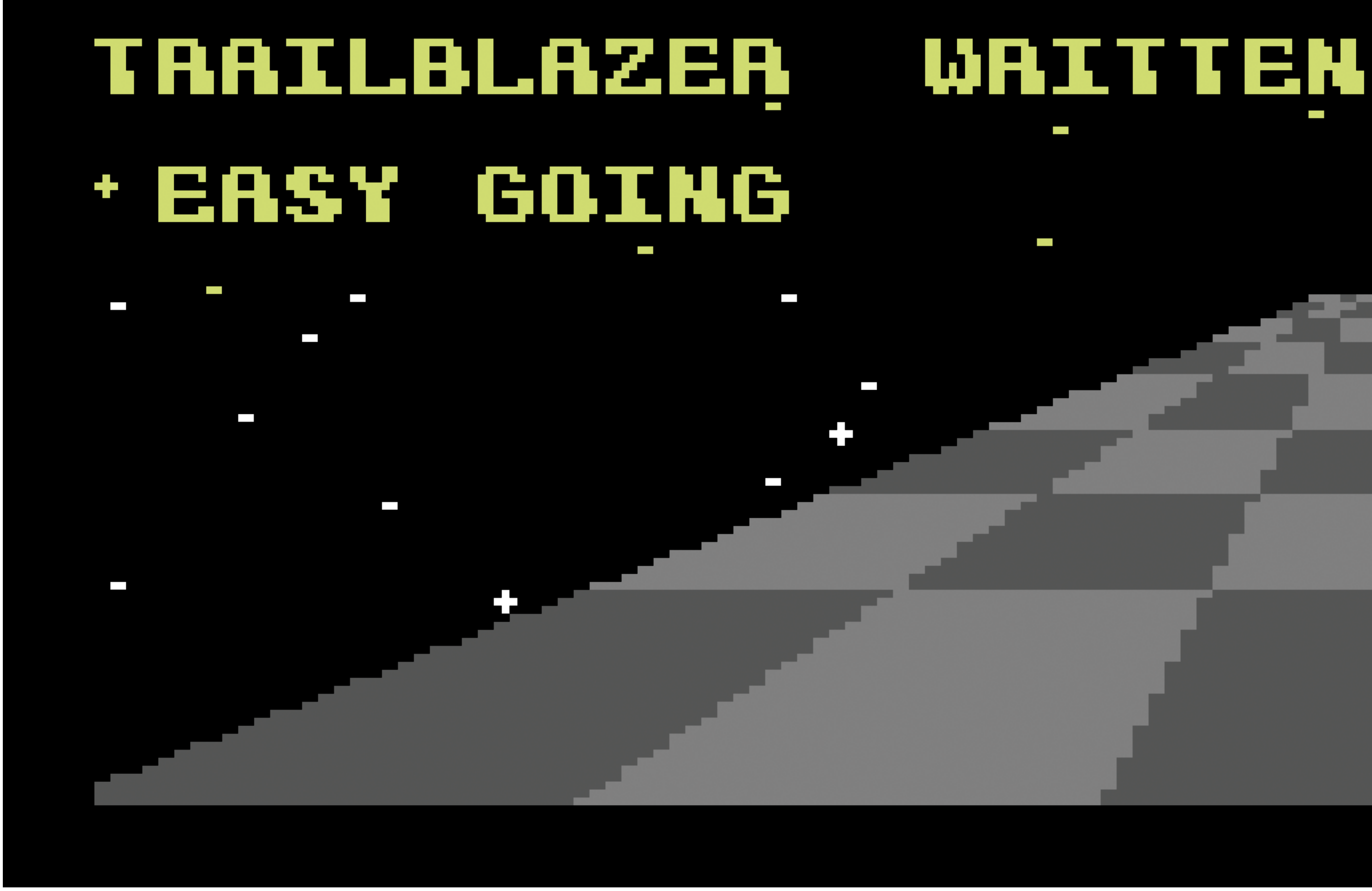
Regardless, *Atari 50*'s unique approach ensures that it's one of the most interesting retro compilations in a very long time. "We definitely feel that Atari fans will enjoy this collection, but for those who are not too familiar with the company or its rich history, we wanted to make sure and present the information and games in an intuitive and fun way," says Stephen. "Everything is fast and built around making it easy for people to navigate to eras, platforms and games or stories that pique their personal interests. On top of that, we even added in a few Easter eggs to make exploring this release even more engaging." Hopefully, it will be the gateway for a whole new audience to appreciate the work of the first giant of videogames. ✱





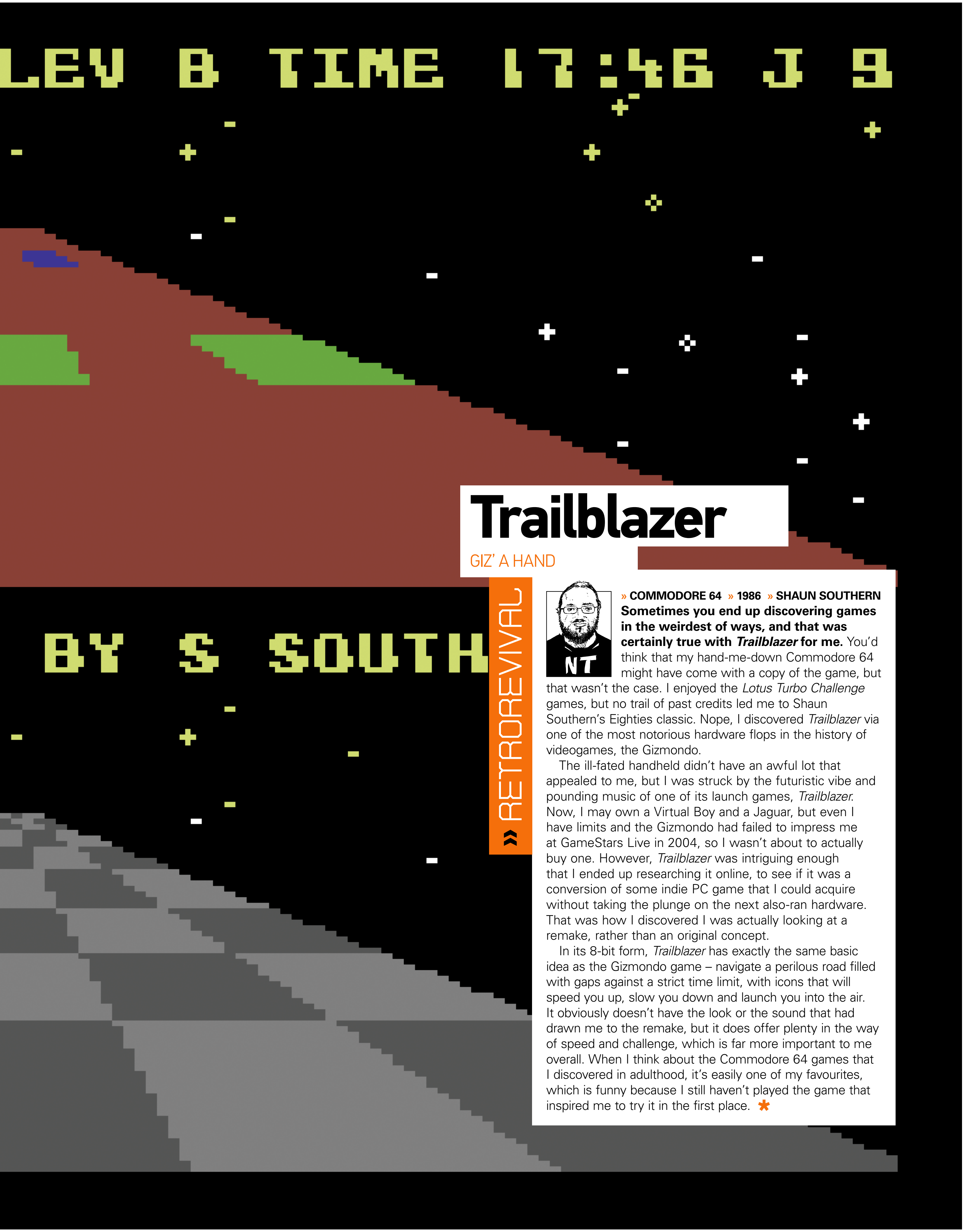
PLAYER 1 SC 0003140

+ WOOLLY JUMPER



TRAILBLAZER WRITTEN

+ EASY GOING



Trailblazer

GIZ' A HAND

» COMMODORE 64 » 1986 » SHAUN SOUTHERN

Sometimes you end up discovering games in the weirdest of ways, and that was certainly true with *Trailblazer* for me. You'd think that my hand-me-down Commodore 64 might have come with a copy of the game, but that wasn't the case. I enjoyed the *Lotus Turbo Challenge* games, but no trail of past credits led me to Shaun Southern's Eighties classic. Nope, I discovered *Trailblazer* via one of the most notorious hardware flops in the history of videogames, the Gizmondo.

The ill-fated handheld didn't have an awful lot that appealed to me, but I was struck by the futuristic vibe and pounding music of one of its launch games, *Trailblazer*. Now, I may own a Virtual Boy and a Jaguar, but even I have limits and the Gizmondo had failed to impress me at GameStars Live in 2004, so I wasn't about to actually buy one. However, *Trailblazer* was intriguing enough that I ended up researching it online, to see if it was a conversion of some indie PC game that I could acquire without taking the plunge on the next also-ran hardware. That was how I discovered I was actually looking at a remake, rather than an original concept.

In its 8-bit form, *Trailblazer* has exactly the same basic idea as the Gizmondo game – navigate a perilous road filled with gaps against a strict time limit, with icons that will speed you up, slow you down and launch you into the air. It obviously doesn't have the look or the sound that had drawn me to the remake, but it does offer plenty in the way of speed and challenge, which is far more important to me overall. When I think about the Commodore 64 games that I discovered in adulthood, it's easily one of my favourites, which is funny because I still haven't played the game that inspired me to try it in the first place. *

ULTIMATE GUIDE

ROBOCOP

AFTER MAKING MILLIONS AT THE BOX OFFICE, ROBOCOP BECAME A MUST-RENT VIDEOTAPE. OCEAN'S 8-BIT ROBOCOP GAMES WERE RELEASED SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE VIDEO, AND HELD THE NUMBER-ONE SPOT ON THE ALL-FORMAT CHART FOR A RECORD 36 WEEKS

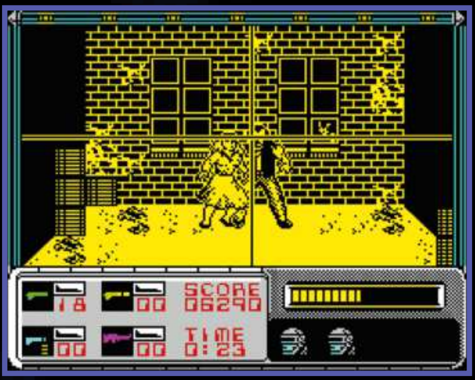
WORDS BY RORY MILNE

When Gary Bracey became a director at Ocean Software in 1985, computer-game adaptations of movies were few and far between. With his help, however, Ocean popularised film-to-game adaptations with the likes of *Cobra*, *Top Gun* and *Platoon*. What's all the more impressive is that Gary would typically assess the potential of forthcoming big-screen attractions purely by reading their scripts. One that caught his eye was Orion Pictures' *RoboCop*, a violent slice of gritty sci-fi that he thought had 'videogame' written all over it.

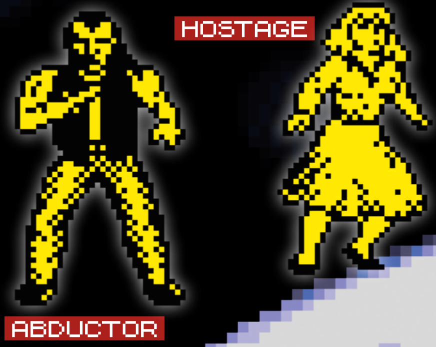
Ocean cofounder Jon Woods agreed, and thanks to *RoboCop* being a relatively low-budget movie his firm was able to secure worldwide videogame rights across all formats for a very reasonable outlay. Of course, given that Ocean was a UK home-computer games publisher, its focus was on developing versions of *RoboCop* for the popular British micros. It didn't yet have a presence in the American games market, and it wasn't involved in arcade development, so an arrangement was made to sub-license the *RoboCop* coin-op, pinball and certain US computer and console rights to the Japanese arcade developer Data East.

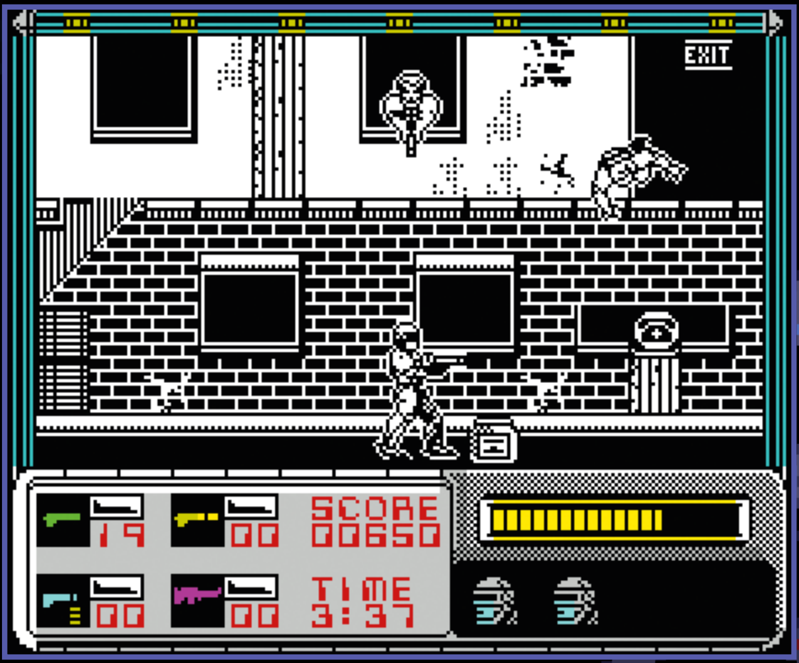
This unusual arrangement led to Ocean taking an atypical approach when designing its *RoboCop* titles. Data East's US operation was a short flight from Hollywood, and it visited the *RoboCop* movie set to inform the direction it was going to take with its coin-op. Ocean, by comparison, had to make do with limited footage shipped over on videotape. Data East clearly had the edge, both in respect of its greater knowledge of the film and in terms of the capabilities of the tech it was designing for, so Ocean decided to use the arcade firm's coin-op as the basis for its *RoboCop* computer games.

Hot off of coding a string of popular Z80 arcade conversions for Ocean, Mike



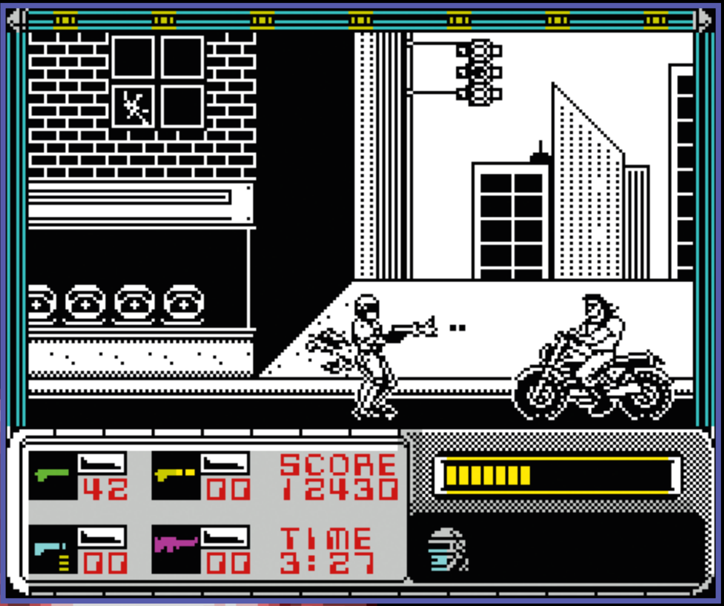
» [ZX Spectrum] Unlike the coin-op, the kidnapping in Ocean's home-computer *RoboCop* has a third-person perspective.





» [ZX Spectrum] In the Spectrum *RoboCop* you collect jars of baby food to replenish your energy bar.

> "WE PARTLY MADE IT A SIDE-SCROLLING SHOOTER BECAUSE THE ARCADE GAME FROM DATA EAST DID THAT. AT THE TIME, ARCADE GAMES WERE VERY MUCH THE LEAD FORMAT"
>
> **MIKE LAMB**



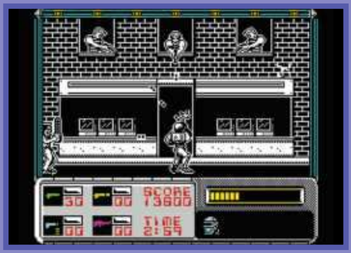
» [ZX Spectrum] The criminals in *RoboCop* include thugs on motorbikes that ride straight at the law enforcer.

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW THE NUMEROUS VERSIONS OF ROBOCOP COMPARE

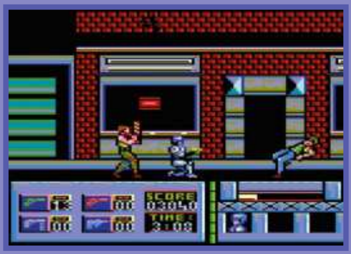
ZX SPECTRUM

■ It may be monochrome, but the Spectrum *RoboCop* plays as well as Ocean's more colourful 8-bit versions. Unlike the C64 iteration, its hero doesn't jump and its snipers don't often respawn. Playing the Spectrum 128 version is advised, as it has three-channel music and speech.



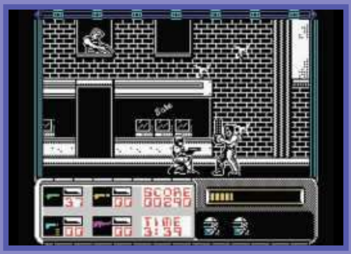
AMSTRAD CPC

■ The Amstrad *RoboCop* sounds identical to the Spectrum 128 version, but it uses the system's low-res mode, so it's a lot more colourful. Its level designs are exactly like those in the Spectrum *RoboCop*, meaning it has side-on firefights interspersed with 3D and puzzle stages.



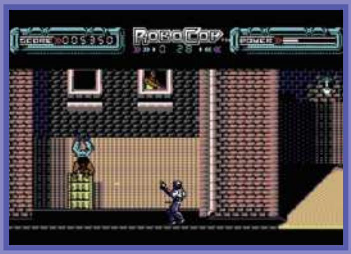
MSX

■ If not for a few failings in the audio department, the MSX *RoboCop* would be a mirror image of the Spectrum 128 game. There's no speech pre-game or between stages, which is forgivable, but it's a shame that the in-game music stops every time that a sound effect is triggered.



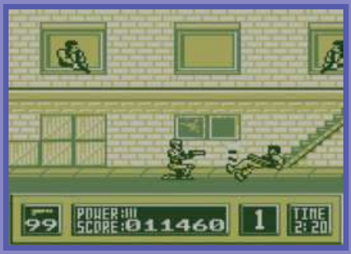
C64

■ Similar to the Amstrad version, but with better music, the C64 *RoboCop* differs in that its hero can jump – although this isn't very useful. It does have a moving ED-209, unlike Ocean's other 8-bit versions. But you don't get the huge gun to play with at the end of the game.



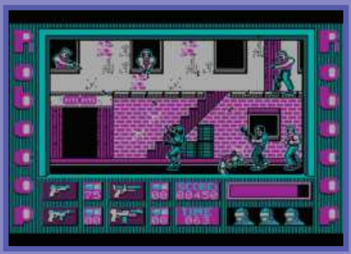
GAME BOY

■ Drab colours aside, the Game Boy *RoboCop* is a better version of Ocean's 8-bit micro iterations. As well as satisfying sound effects on top of great in-game music, it has foes that run at you and others that throw bombs. It also adapts the coin-op's shooting-gallery stage.



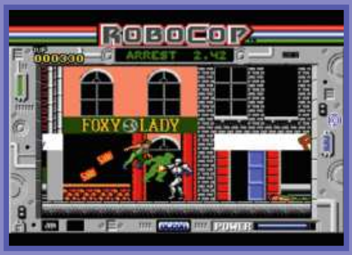
PC (CGA)

■ Rendered in pink, cyan, black and white, Ocean's DOS *RoboCop* was never going to win any prizes for its looks. Its lack of music and beepy sound effects do little to impress either. In gameplay terms, it plays just like the Spectrum and MSX versions, which is no bad thing.



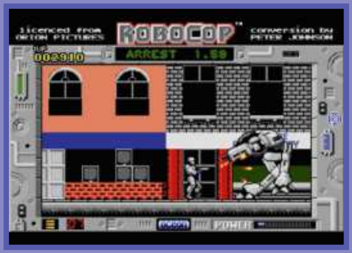
AMIGA

■ More like the coin-op than Ocean's 8-bit games, the Amiga *RoboCop* is arguably the best version that Ocean produced. Its hero starts without his gun, instead using his fists to see off criminals, it incorporates two photo-fit stages, a huge gun and end-of-level boss fights.



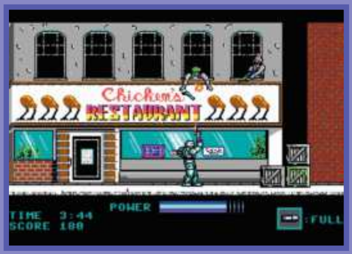
ATARI ST

■ There's little between the ST and Amiga versions of *RoboCop* in terms of visuals. The ST game has the same speech samples as the Amiga title too. Where the Atari iteration fails is with its music and sound effects, which pale in comparison to those of its Amiga counterpart.



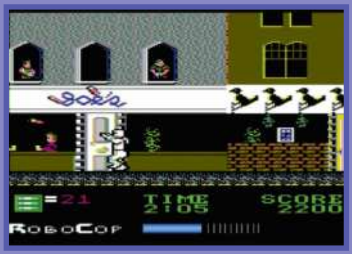
PC (EGA)

■ Whereas Ocean developed its PC *RoboCop* in four-colour CGA mode, Data East produced its PC offering in 16-colour EGA mode, so it's a much better-looking game. In gameplay terms, it's pretty close to the coin-op, except with weak sound effects and appalling chiptune music.



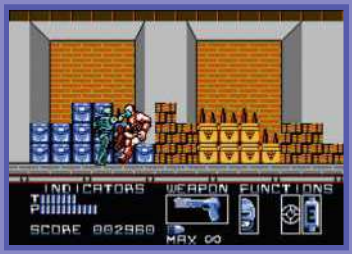
APPLE II

■ An Apple IIe/c title as opposed to one for the original Apple II, this version makes a brave attempt to convert the coin-op to a far less-powerful system. The main concessions are that it's flick-screen instead of scrolling, and is silent bar for some meagre sound effects.



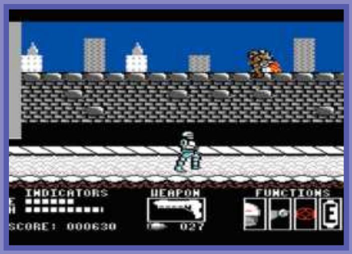
NES

■ Quite different from the arcade game in some ways, the NES *RoboCop* incorporates elements of the coin-op's gameplay while introducing completely fresh level designs that have little to do with the movie. It's slick and frenetic, though, and includes boss fights with ED-209.



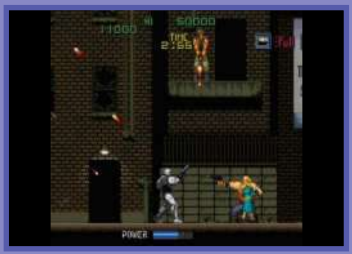
TRS-80 COCO

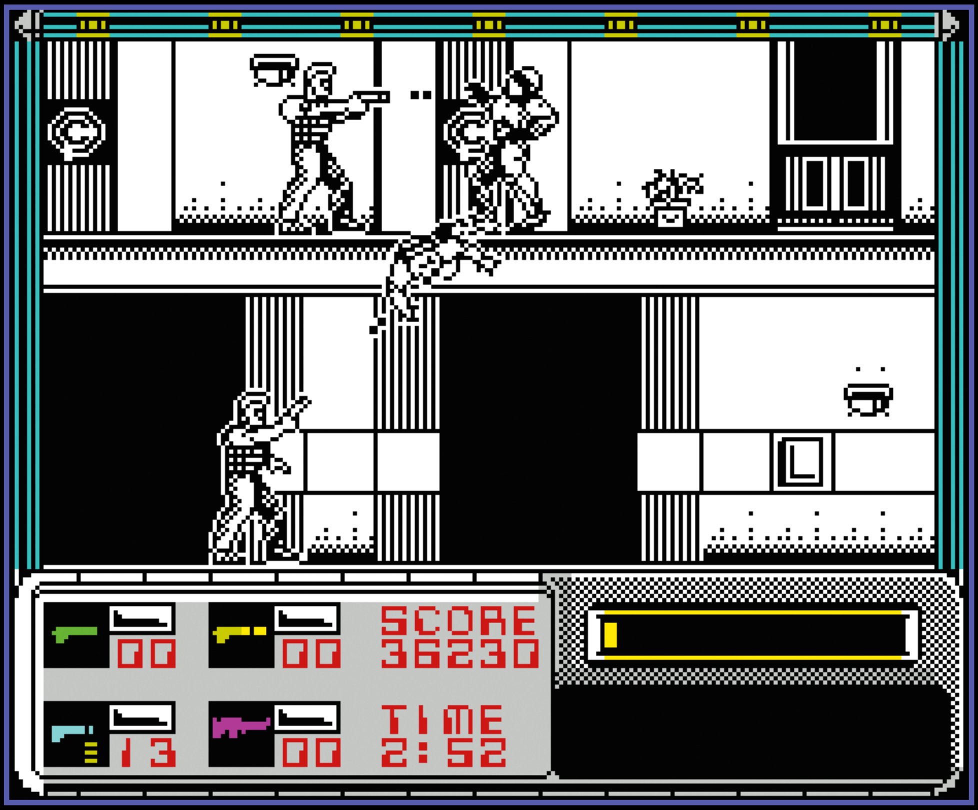
■ A conversion of the NES release, which falls flat partly thanks to the Tandy system's less impressive visual and audio capabilities. The TRS *RoboCop*'s graphics are not that well-designed either, but its main issues are its dull in-game music and poorly animated characters.



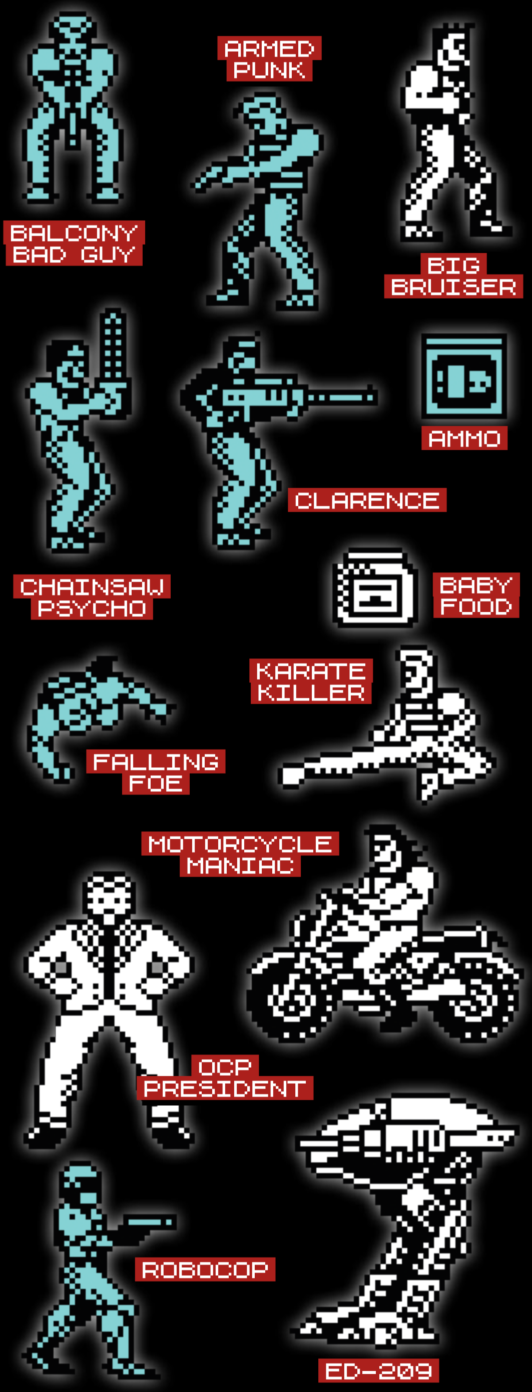
ARCADE

■ As the version made for the most advanced hardware, Data East's coin-op is predictably the best of the group. Surprisingly, its side-scrolling stages aren't nearly as difficult as those in some of the home-computer iterations, but its end-of-level bosses take some beating.





» [ZX Spectrum] Caution is advised in *RoboCop*, as his opponents can appear from out of nowhere.



▶ Lamb was the obvious choice to design and deliver *RoboCop* for the ZX Spectrum. Artist Dawn Drake had recently worked with him on *Target: Renegade*, and Ocean assigned her to create the graphics for his latest project too. But unlike Mike's previous arcade adaptations, his *RoboCop* design would only incorporate certain aspects of its coin-op counterpart, while reimagining or dispensing with others, and adding entirely new challenges.

> "WE HAD THE STAGE WITH THE GUY GRABBING THE GIRL IN THE ALLEYWAY. YOU COULD EVEN SHOOT BETWEEN THE GIRL'S LEGS TO HIT THE GUY'S GROIN!"
>
> **MIKE LAMB**

Just like the arcade title, Mike made his Spectrum *RoboCop* a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up – although he deferred to the movie in respect of not having his game's hero jump, despite this being an aspect of the coin-op. Then where Data East's arcade offering depicted the film's kidnap scene from a side-on viewpoint, Mike instead opted to present this part of the movie in 3D, with a moving crosshair to target the business end of RoboCop's pistol.

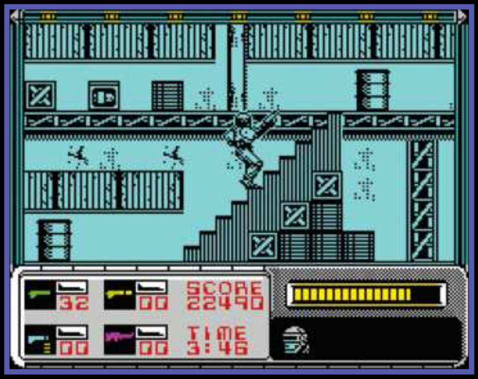
More fundamental deviations came with Mike's Spectrum game having strutting criminals rather than sprinting felons like those in the coin-op, and he added many more armed thugs at windows to make up for not including the bomb-throwing maniacs in the arcade game. To balance the challenge of the Spectrum title, Mike armed RoboCop with a sidearm from the beginning of the game – in contrast to Data East's coin-op, which made the hero rely on his fists until midway through the first level.

Since Mike had only six months to complete his project, the decision to largely drop the boss fights from the arcade *RoboCop* was a sensible one – although he made an exception for the movie's memorable robotic adversary ED-209. The Spectrum adaptation also omitted the coin-op's firing range intermissions, although this was no great loss.

In terms of fresh concepts, a photo-fit-based puzzle sub-game was added to the Spectrum *RoboCop*, in which players had to replicate the face of one of the hero's killers by piecing together individual facial features. Chainsaw-wielding thugs and martial-arts maniacs were also added to the Spectrum title, neither of which appeared in the arcade game.

Otherwise, Mike's adaptation faithfully replicated the structure and mechanics of the remaining stages in the Data East coin-op – including its four-way scrolling drugs lab, its OCP building levels and its hostage scene finale. The same team that developed *RoboCop* for the Spectrum also converted their game for the Amstrad CPC. It played identically to the Sinclair version in terms of mechanics and level design, but Dawn Drake differentiated it with more colourful sprites and backgrounds.

For the Commodore 64 *RoboCop* being developed alongside the two Z80 offerings, Ocean newcomer John Meegan handled ▶



DEVELOPER Q&A

MIKE LAMB ON DEVELOPING ROBOCOP FOR THE SPECTRUM AND AMSTRAD

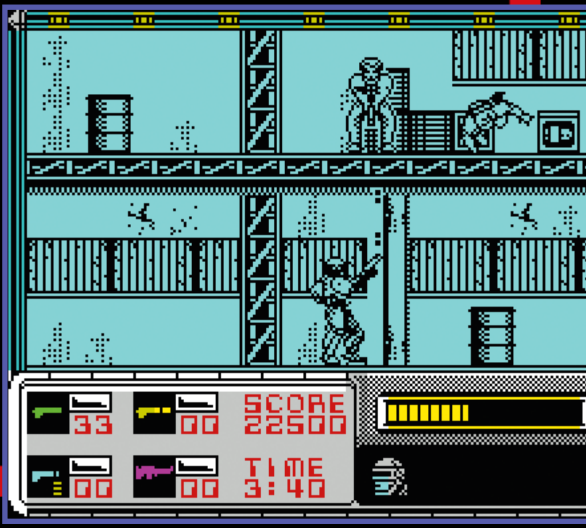
■ Why did Ocean largely base its *RoboCop* games around the film's gunfights?
There was a fair bit of shooting in the movie, and that was easy to translate. We partly made it a side-scrolling shooter because the arcade game from Data East did that. At the time, arcade games were very much the lead format, so we were trying to copy the coin-op a little bit. I suppose we could have done an *Operation Wolf*-type take on RoboCop, but we hadn't finished making the *actual Operation Wolf* yet!

■ But Ocean's *RoboCop* wasn't entirely a side-scrolling shooter.
No. To be fair to us, we did actually break-up the shooting. We had the puzzle stage, with the face-matching. Then we had the stage with the guy grabbing the girl in the alleyway, which I guess *was* like *Operation Wolf*. You could even shoot between the girl's legs to hit the guy's groin! The photo-fit puzzle was Simon Butler's idea. I wouldn't say that it was the best part of the game, because once you had seen all of the matches they weren't that hard to solve. But it did tie-in with the plot of the movie.

■ Why wasn't RoboCop able to jump in the Spectrum and Amstrad games?
I guess it was because we didn't really *want* to make him jump. We weren't thinking of him as Mario! In the coin-op he could jump to avoid grenades or something. But I guess we thought it was a bit odd, so we didn't follow through with that. Any game that had a jump in it usually had an exaggerated jump, because to make a platformer work you really needed a big jump, and I think a big jump really would have been a bit too much for RoboCop.

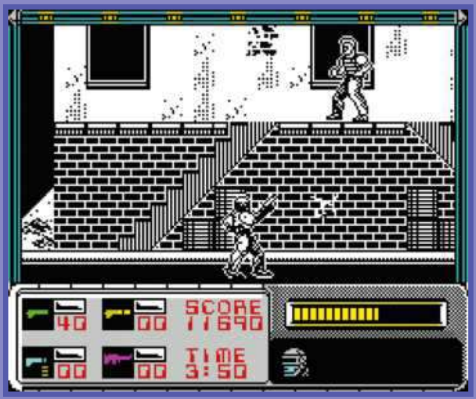
■ What sort of oversight did you get from the makers of the movie?
There was very little. Orion wasn't a huge studio. Although back then even the major studios were fairly relaxed about what you could do in a game. So I don't remember having to get a whole lot of approval for *RoboCop*. It was unusual back then that a licence holder would even take an interest. It would have been great if we had gotten a visit by the *RoboCop* movie people; we would have been happy if we had, but they were hands off.

■ Did Ocean expect its *RoboCop* games to be such a massive success?
Ocean had hoped *RoboCop* would be good. Gary Bracey had read the script, and he was very big on the movie. Rightly so, I believe. When it came out it wasn't *huge* at the box office, but then the video was released at the same time as the game, and both of them ended up being pretty big. The sales team had thought that *Operation Wolf* was going to be number one at Christmas, and that did big numbers, but *RoboCop* just kept on going.



SUPERIOR STAGES

THE MOST MEMORABLE OF ROBOCOP'S ECLECTIC LEVELS



MEAN STREETS

■ In all of the versions, *RoboCop* begins with the hero on patrol. The challenge is to take out snipers, street level thugs, Hells Angels ripping up the sidewalks and karate killers. In some of the Ocean iterations you also have to foil a kidnapping in a third-person perspective sub-level.

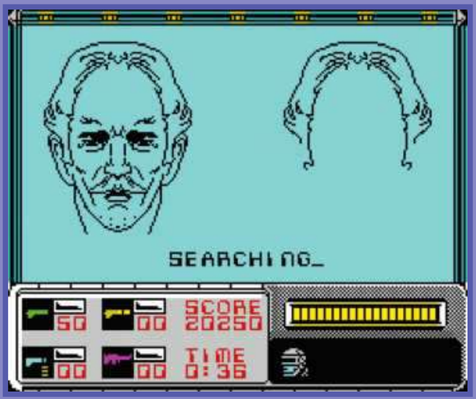
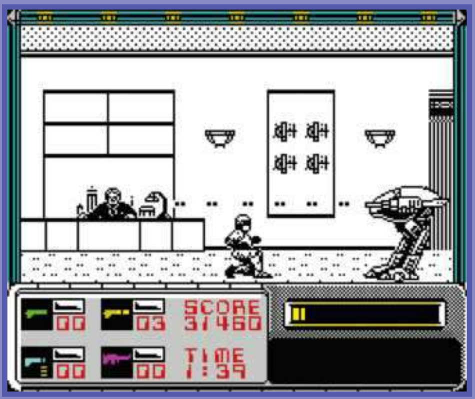


PHOTO-FIT PUZZLE

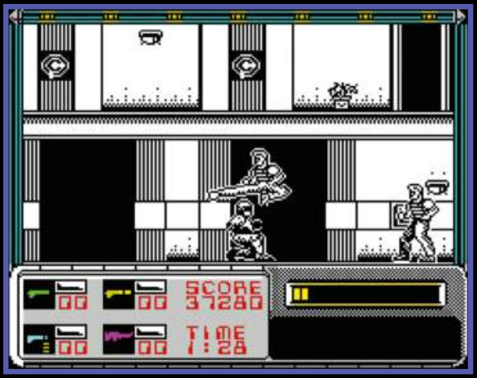
■ In a stage reflecting the film, you're shown an image of one of RoboCop's killers from his fragmented memories. You then have to make an exact copy from distinct facial features. This produces a match from a criminal database, which sets the cyborg on a mission to avenge his own death.



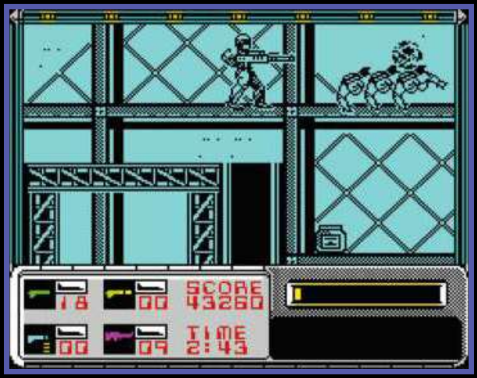
ENCOUNTERING ED-209

■ After discovering that an OCP executive ordered his demise, RoboCop tries to arrest him. But this triggers the hero's fourth directive, which gives OCP execs immunity. The suit then brings in ED-209 – a machine gun on legs, and in order to disable it RoboCop has to punch it three times.

the coding duties while using Mike's design as a template. A few changes were made, however, such as reinstating the jumping from the Data East arcade game and ditching the karate killers from the Spectrum and Amstrad versions. Naturally, the C64 game was also given an improved soundtrack and in-game audio effects to take advantage of the system's superior sound chip.



» [ZX Spectrum] The martial artists in *RoboCop* can be avoided by ducking at just the right moment.



» [ZX Spectrum] You don't get the huge gun in *RoboCop* for long, but it's fun while it lasts!

The timing of the release of Ocean's three 8-bit *RoboCop* titles was interesting. The movie hit UK cinemas in February 1988, at which point Data East's coin-op wasn't quite ready for release. It was scheduled to start arriving in arcades around the world in November of that year, which by design or coincidence was when *RoboCop* was due to be released on videotape in the UK.

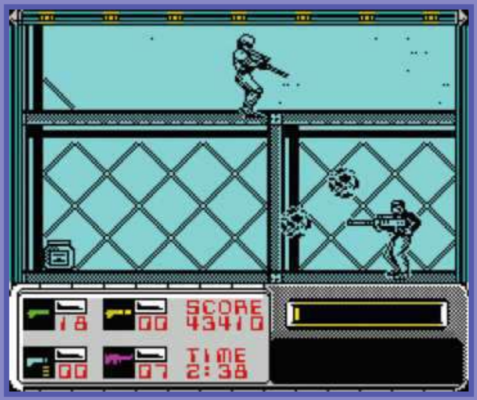
Of course, Ocean jumped at the chance of tapping into the publicity generated by these two products, and lined-up its 8-bit computer game adaptations to come out at the same time as them. The combination of this intense marketing and the glowing reviews received by the games resulted in them heading straight for the top of the sales charts, just in time for the festive season.

Given the scale of Ocean's success with *RoboCop* on the big three 8-bit micros, it was only a matter of time before the company developed versions for the 16-bit Amiga and ST. These duly came out in the spring of 1989, and more closely resembled the arcade game than the Spectrum, Amstrad and C64 adaptations. At around the same time, Ocean released versions for the MSX and PC that were all but identical to its Spectrum game. Then Data East put out its own PC adaptation in the US, which was much closer to the *RoboCop* seen in arcades than Ocean's DOS title had been. Later in the year, Data East published variants of its coin-op for the NES and Apple II, and Tandy brought out a similar game for its TRS-80 Color Computer system.

Last but not least, Ocean's Mike Lamb adapted and enhanced his Spectrum *RoboCop* for the Game Boy. This portable version was released in the run-up to Christmas 1990, and it incorporated several features from the arcade title that Mike's home-computer iterations had lacked. Interestingly, a tougher revision of the Game Boy release appeared in 1991 with less power-ups and a stricter time limit on the first stage, but Mike didn't recall this version when we asked him about it previously, so it may have been requested elsewhere within Ocean.

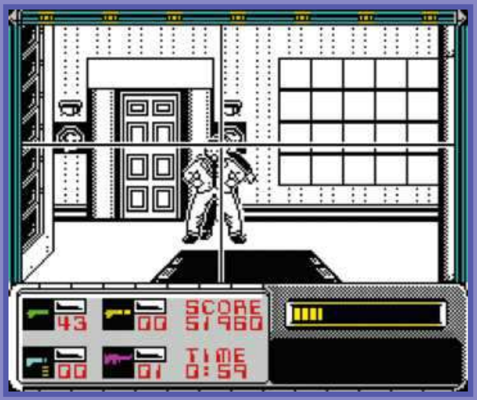
Ocean's various takes on cinema's law enforcer of the future were not just popular in the short term, however, in fact *RoboCop* topped the all-format charts for around nine months. The game also got to number one in the Spectrum chart in short order, and once it was there it stuck around for over a year-and-a-half. It then remained in the top five for a further eight months.

In retrospect, Ocean's Spectrum *RoboCop* still plays well today, and it quite rightly has the reputation of being one of the best titles released for the system during its commercial lifespan. ✱



JUNKYARD ASSAULT

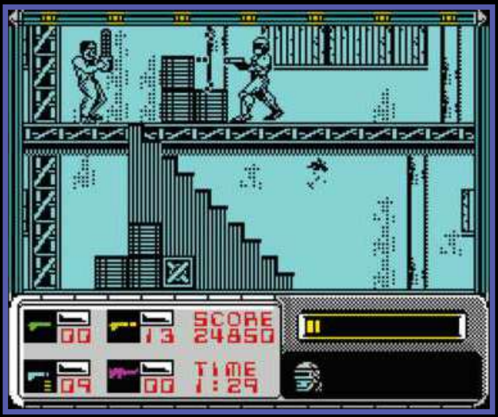
■ You can end up in enemy crossfire in *RoboCop*'s junkyard level, but if you're careful you can pick off foes as they appear. In some versions you meet the hero's murderer Clarence, who has a huge gun. But if you survive you get it for yourself, which makes the rest of the stage a breeze.



PRESIDENTIAL PANIC

■ *RoboCop*'s finale gives the hero a chance to dispatch the former OCP weasel that put out a hit on him – although there's a snag. The ex-executive is holding OCP's president hostage, and the cyborg has to avoid shooting him while trying to get his revenge on his sworn enemy.

> "THE SALES TEAM HAD THOUGHT THAT OPERATION WOLF WAS GOING TO BE NUMBER ONE AT CHRISTMAS, AND THAT DID BIG NUMBERS, BUT ROBOCOP JUST KEPT ON GOING"
>
> **MIKE LAMB**



gog com

STUDIO PROFILE

This is the tale of how a small startup company in Poland created a global e-commerce business, rescuing, sometimes fixing, and re-releasing good old PC games online. Discover how Gog.com is preserving retro gaming with a genuine passion for the art and its cultural significance

WORDS BY RICHARD HEWISON

» Marcin Paczynski is GOG.com's senior business developer.

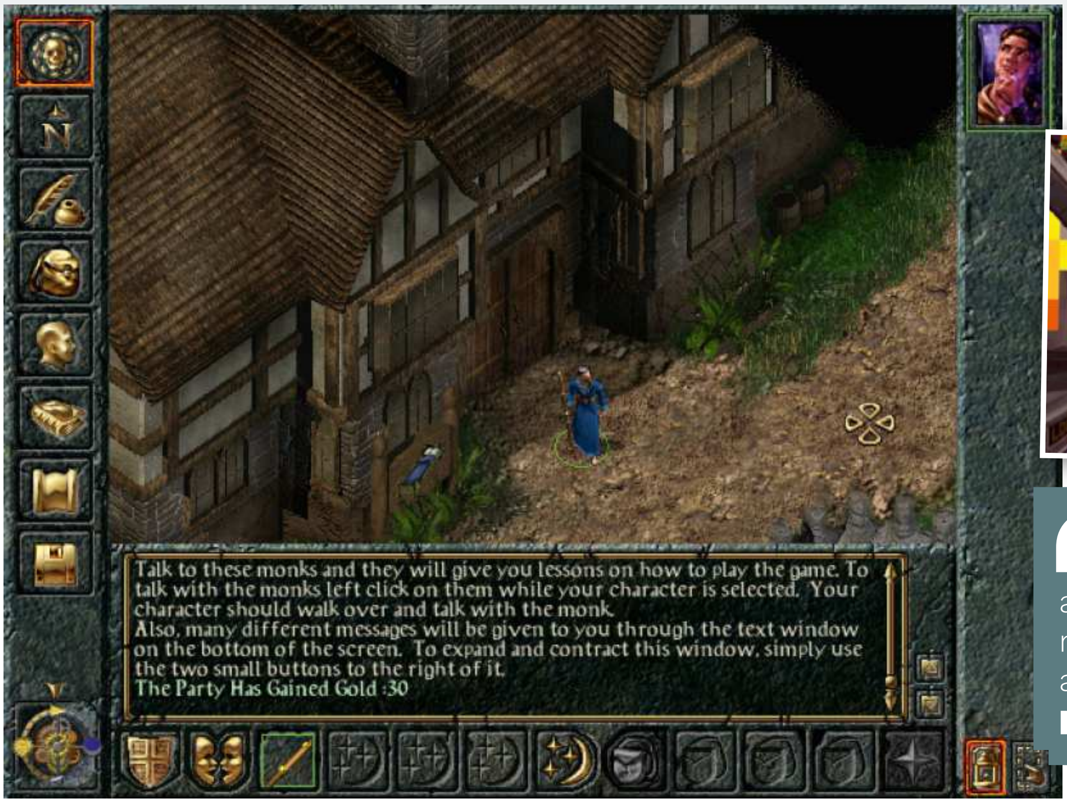
» Maciej Gołebiewski is GOG.com's VP of publishing and monetisation.

Buying genuine, boxed copies of computer-games software in post-communist Poland in the late-Eighties, throughout the Nineties and into the early Noughties wasn't easy, and it certainly wasn't cheap. "The main problem with computers and software back then was that they were very, very expensive," explains Marcin Paczynski, GOG.com's senior business developer. "Typically, you would be spending about 30 percent of your monthly salary on buying an original boxed game, so in Poland it was got around by software piracy."

Local flea markets openly sold pirated games on tapes, floppy disks and later on CD-ROMs, and for many young Polish gamers, they rarely saw a boxed copy and often weren't even aware that the pirated versions were pirated, with many people thinking that the boxed copies were special editions of the individually bagged CD-ROMs they were buying. "I remember putting the very first bootleg game I bought into our CD-ROM drive at home, and it shattered because of the humidity inside the little plastic bag it came in," says Maciej Gołebiewski, GOG.com's VP of publishing and monetisation.

Back in the early Nineties, Polish university graduate Marcin Iwinski was keen to try and bring some legitimacy into software distribution in his homeland, and he established a new company to do just that. In the mid-Nineties, Marcin formed CD Projekt with long-term school friend Michał Kicinski, and they managed to persuade US publisher Interplay to let them not only officially release the RPG *Baldur's Gate* in Poland, but to reverse-engineer the game so they could add localised Polish text and use well-known Polish actors to record digitised speech. The official localised copy cost an extra 50 percent over the cost to buy the pirated version, but not only did the buyer get a game spread across five CDs, but they got a proper box, and all the extra high-quality paraphernalia as well. The experience was totally different to what Polish game players were used to. "It was really impressive,

» [PC] Lucasarts' *Star Wars* games like *Republic Commando* were a huge addition to GOG.com's library.



Talk to these monks and they will give you lessons on how to play the game. To talk with the monks left click on them while your character is selected. Your character should walk over and talk with the monk.
Also, many different messages will be given to you through the text window on the bottom of the screen. To expand and contract this window, simply use the two small buttons to the right of it.
The Party Has Gained Gold :30

» [PC] Translating the text and speech from English into Polish for *Baldur's Gate* was a challenge.

SCORE:
LASER LVL: 1
CONCSN MISSILE

> "Typically, you would be spending about 30 percent of your monthly salary on buying an original boxed game"
> **Marcin Paczynski**

and it changed the mindset of a lot of people in Poland to move from pirated copies to original ones," says Marcin Paczynski. "The quality of what you got in the box… the manual, the map… it was way better than buying cheap CDs from a flea market."

That achievement isn't one to be underestimated. The situation in Poland was incredibly challenging, so shipping those copies and getting them to paying customers was a struggle. "In the early Noughties there was still no strong retail or distribution of games," explains Maciej. The fact that CD Projekt not only hit its minimal contractual targets for that version of *Baldur's Gate* but exceeded them proved that a substantial market was there.

Natural progression and a desire to do games development properly led to the acquisition of the *Witcher* licence, based upon Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski's hugely popular fantasy novels, and the formation of CD Projekt Red as a development studio. *The Witcher* on the PC debuted in 2007, and it was clear that CD Projekt's future lay in writing games rather than just distributing them. It also gave Michał Kicinski the encouragement and the confidence to pursue his desire to create a subsidiary business that focused on a DRM-free digital distribution model for classic PC games. He wanted it to be simple and not be overly expensive for the end-customer.

The experience CD Projekt had distributing genuine boxed games gave the new venture some credibility when it came to persuading companies to go the digital route years later, but it was still not an easy sell. "The success of the first *Witcher* game also helped, as we had a successful title," says Marcin Paczynski. "More doors were open to us than before."

Slowly but surely software distribution in Eastern Europe was becoming more mature and more complex, and more Western companies were starting to take notice. However, legitimate digital distribution was almost non-existent. Although Steam had been around for a few years since 2003, it was not yet the digital distribution and publication platform that it is today. Old, classic PC games were only available via the distinctly unofficial so-called Abandonware piracy websites and getting those hacked and pirated games to work required an expertise that was beyond many people at the time. If the new business was going to be successful, it would need to resolve IP rights and countless technical and resourcing issues first.

"This was at the point in time when PC games from the Nineties were starting to not work on more modern computers, especially DOS titles," remembers Maciej. "CD Projekt had some previous retail experience in

▶

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Diagnosis progress

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

MOVEMENTS OF THE KEY PLAYERS

MARCIN IWINSKI

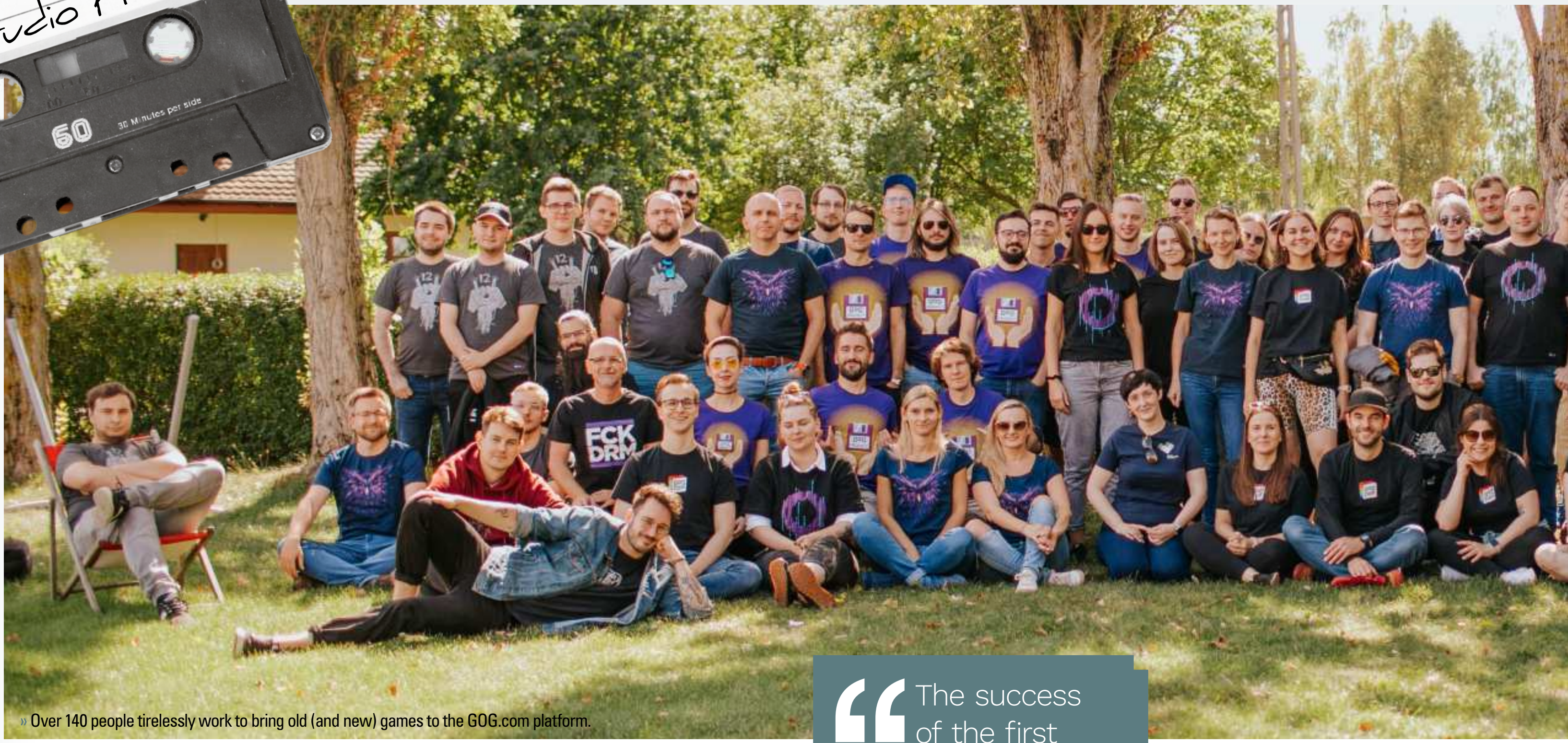
■ Marcin has been an avid gamer since his school days when he played on an Amiga and a PC. He forged a friendship with fellow gamer and pupil Michał Kicinski which ultimately paved the way for the creation of GOG.com. Marcin's vision has always been clear. Giving gamers value for money and the best possible experience, without intrusive DRM. Marcin is currently joint-CEO at CD Projekt, GOG.com's parent company.

MICHAŁ KICINSKI

■ Michał wanted their new online digital distribution platform GOG.com to give IP owners the chance to sell their back catalogue titles at a time when physical releases were getting less shelf space at retail, and so their old games were no longer considered relevant. He wanted to give the games he grew up with a new lease of life. Michał cofounded CD Projekt and Mudita and has various business interests.

PIOTR KARWOWSKI

■ Piotr was a web developer working for Marcin and Michał's CD Projekt company when the task of creating GOG.com was given to him by Michał in March 2007, six months before the retail launch of CD Projekt Red's first *Witcher* game. Piotr was the ideal candidate to take it on. He is currently a member of the board at CD Projekt and co-manages GOG.com.



» Over 140 people tirelessly work to bring old (and new) games to the GOG.com platform.

> “The success of the first Witcher game also helped, as we had a successful title”
> **Marcin Paczynski**

Poland with something called Extra Classics, which were older games updated to run on current PCs sold at a good price point, and they sold very well so there was a need, especially on a global level with many older games no longer working.”

That desire to sell digital versions of fully working classic PC games without DRM gave birth to Good Old Games in 2008. The removal of digital rights management was a cornerstone of the venture’s business model, as it wanted the games to be hassle-free for the paying customer, with the on-disk copy protection or protection systems stripped out, as Marcin Paczynski explains. “In reality DRM wasn’t working because the pirated versions removed it anyway, and the only person being given a bad time was the paying consumer, and we wanted them to have the best possible experience.”

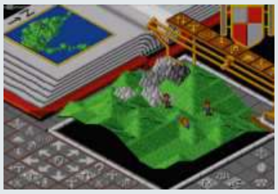
“It’s fair that the developer expects someone to prove that they bought the game, but not by putting on so many constraints that it is hurting the people who paid,” adds Maciej. Having said that, some DRM techniques are included in virtual form in certain GOG.com releases if it forms part of the game-playing experience.

Creating a digital software distribution platform from scratch was an enormous and very complicated task. As Good Old Games was blazing the trail on its own, there was nobody to partner with as far as the infrastructure was concerned. Piotr Karwowski was tasked with helping to get the project off the ground, and he was part of a team that brainstormed how they were going to achieve Michał Kicinski’s vision. “They were a group of very passionate and very motivated individuals who rented a very small office in Warsaw, and they sat there for a year and created the platform on their own,” reveals Maciej.

“The guys who did that at the beginning did an amazing job as there were no major issues on launch. It was done in a simple way, but it was more than enough for what the community needed at the time,” adds Marcin Paczynski. “Now, with the GOG.com Galaxy app, we have more sophisticated ways to update games, including cloud saves, achievements and things like that, so it’s now getting exponentially more complicated and it’s a huge undertaking which is really not easy to do.”

Getting the original version of it digital distribution platform up and running was a big and critical achievement, but it was only the first stage. There were two more huge hurdles to overcome before Good Old Games could be launched. The first was finding some IP owners willing to take that step into the unknown with the company. Persuading publishers that the business model they were proposing could work was a challenge taken on by GOG.com’s senior VP of business development and operations, Oleg Klapovskiy. “The existing relationship with Interplay certainly helped, but we had to be very specific about what we were trying to do, explaining what value we were trying to bring to gamers,” says Maciej. “Nobody wanted to be first with the DRM-free and all that. Let’s see how that goes with someone else. Why me?”

GAMES TO DISCOVER



POPULOUS
PC, MAC 1989
■ The original God game, from Peter Molyneux and Bullfrog, originally inspired by Lego.

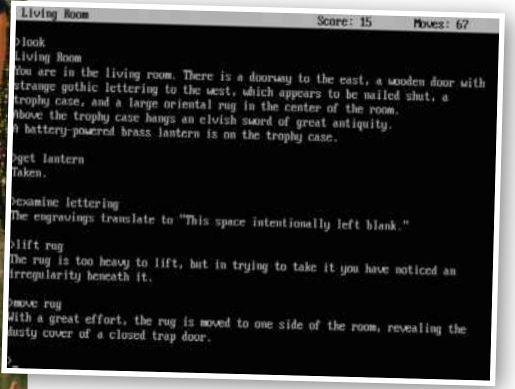
SPELLCASTING 101
PC, MAC, LINUX 1990
■ A point-and-click text adventure set in a school for wizards, years before Harry Potter came along.

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD – THE STYGIAN ABYSS
PC, MAC 1992
■ An early example of a free movement 3D fantasy world, set in the *Ultima* universe.

STAR TREK: JUDGMENT RITES
PC, MAC, LINUX 1993
■ This point-and-click graphic adventure has the original cast voicing their classic characters.

I shall try not to disappoint you, old friend.

WING COMMANDER III: HEART OF THE TIGER
PC, MAC 1994
■ Tons of FMV featuring Mark Hamill in the third part of the popular *Wing Commander* series.



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Living Room                                          Score: 15       Moves: 67
>look
Living Room
You are in the living room. There is a doorway to the east, a wooden door with
strange gothic lettering to the west, which appears to be nailed shut, a
trophy case, and a large oriental rug in the center of the room.
Above the trophy case hangs an elvish sword of great antiquity.
A battery-powered brass lantern is on the trophy case.

>get lantern
Taken.

>examine lettering
The engravings translate to "This space intentionally left blank."

>lift rug
The rug is too heavy to lift, but in trying to take it you have noticed an
irregularity beneath it.

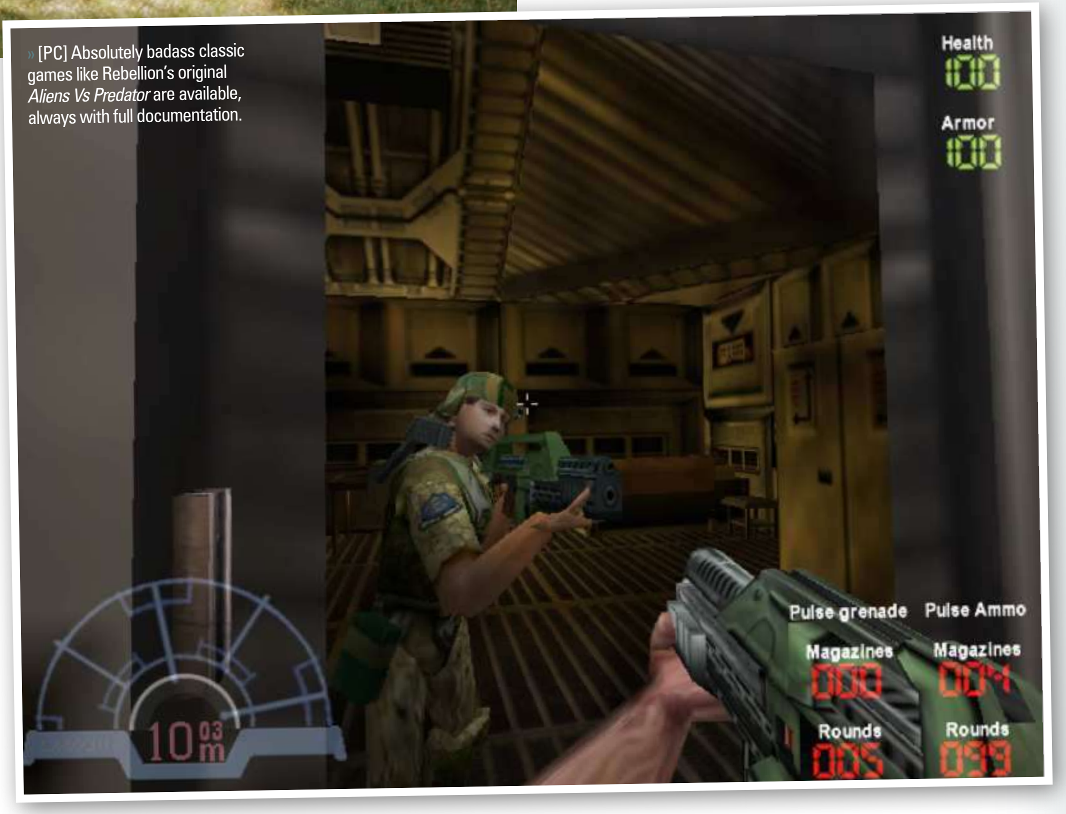
>move rug
With a great effort, the rug is moved to one side of the room, revealing the
dusty cover of a closed trap door.

>
```

» [PC] Every possible game genre is available, including classic text adventures like Infocom's *Zork*.

Getting a publisher on board was obviously a huge step in the right direction, but unfortunately the process was and still is much more complicated than that. "Proving IP ownership these days is a well-oiled machine, because we now have a lot of experience doing that. For much older games, we need to be creative. Making sense of it all where rights are maybe split between different people, and maybe someone has died, and rights are inherited… it can be really complex. In order to get a game released, you need to have three things from the owner," explains Marcin Paczynski. "They need to own the IP or have an active licence for the IP. They need to own everything that comes in the game, so the code, the builds, assets, music… everything. The third thing they need to have is the worldwide distribution rights, and the older the games are, the blurrier this all gets."

The paper trail that proves ownership of the IP can take years to resolve, as Marcin goes on to admit. "We have some great titles that we still haven't released. If you see the community wish list on the website, if a game has more ▶



» [PC] Absolutely badass classic games like Rebellion's original *Aliens Vs Predator* are available, always with full documentation.

WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT

PC, 1995

■ From the first two *Warhammer* strategy games. Plan your deployment then enter the battle!

LOST EDEN

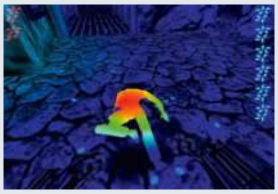
PC, LINUX 1995

■ Discover talking pterosaurs and humans in this uniquely oddball graphic adventure from French developer Cryo Interactive.

QUAKE II

PC, 1997

■ Id Software's *Quake II* delivered as a sequel on so many levels and remains a great shooter!



ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR

PC, 1999

■ Until *Alien Isolation* debuted, this was probably the best *Alien* game of them all.

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

PC, 2006

■ This is an epic *Star Wars* wargame, similar to RTS titles like *Command & Conquer*.

FIRE
NORMAL
OVERLOAD

» [PC] *Star Trek* is another high-profile licence that GOG.com have available in its library of older games.

TRAINING
CHAFF
FLARE
DECOY
FUEL
THRUST

» [PC] Pilots can get their air fix from GOG.com playing flight simulators like *F117-A* from Microprose.

» [PC] Occasionally, GOG.com offers free games to download, like Revolution Software's graphic adventure *Beneath A Steel Sky*.

CHAR
QUESTS
MAP
MENU
INV
SPELLS

» [PC] Sometimes, originally unofficial add-ons get incorporated into GOG.com releases, like the Hellfire level for *Diablo*.

> "There are people out there who care about games, and do want to make them last forever"
> **Maciej Gołebiewski**

than 300 votes then you can be certain we have worked on trying to get it. Whenever we do the research, we are contacting the people who we think have the rights for some or all of the elements, but it's up to those people or companies to say, 'Yes, we have checked and we have those rights,' and sometimes the rights are all over the place and other times they do their own research, and the results are inconclusive."

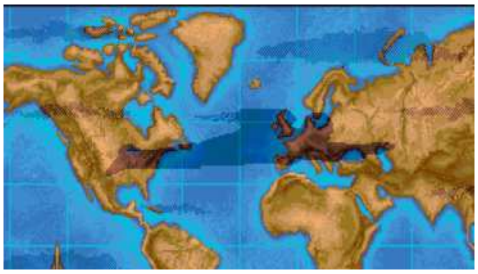
If a company believes it has the rights but can't conclusively produce the paperwork to prove that its interpretation is correct, then a decision has to be made. "Then it becomes a risk-versus-reward situation for them," continues Marcin Paczynski. "They have to decide whether it's really worth it. For big companies that are interested in multimillion-dollar deals, pushing through a deal on the very low end of earnings will often take a lot of time. We sometimes have to wait for the stars to align before we can push through and get the deal done."

"*Diablo Hellfire* is a good example," interjects Maciej, talking about the unofficial add-on for the isometric ARPG *Diablo*. "That was a very complicated release to get done. *Legacy Of Kain* was another. We were ready to release at 3pm, and at 2pm we got an email that said, 'We've got to double-check something with the rights.' Fast-forward eight or ten years later, and we finally managed to release it!"

"We had a number of great games from Square Enix, but for that one game it took eight years before they could confirm they had the rights," adds Marcin Paczynski. "I think they put in a lot of work at their end to sort that all out."

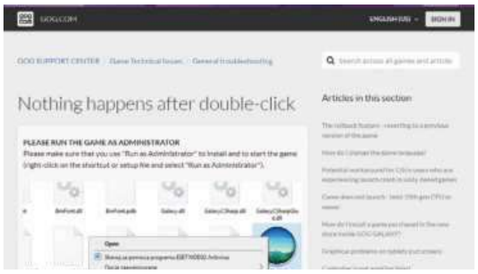
These days, Good Old Games is known as GOG.com to more accurately reflect the

DNA OF GOG.COM



DRM-FREE

■ Code wheels, keywords and on-disk protection schemes were all part of games publisher's ongoing war against software piracy. None of them defeated the hackers, and GOG.com insists on no digital rights management, except in rare cases where it becomes part of the gameplay.



Nothing happens after double-click

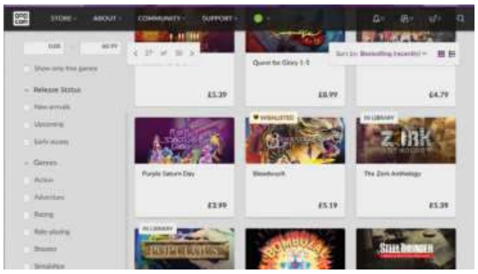
PLEASE RUN THE GAME AS ADMINISTRATOR

Please make sure that you use "Run as Administrator" to install and to start the game (right-click on the shortcut or setup file and select "Run as Administrator").

Articles in this section

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

■ A huge amount of effort goes into making games work when someone buys from GOG.com. However, if a gamer has trouble getting a title to run on their computer, help is always at hand, either from the official technical support or from the online community.



A HUGE SELECTION

■ GOG.com started in 2008. Fourteen years later, it now offers a choice of over 1,400 classic good old games to choose from, across every possible genre. With new Indie and AAA releases available as well, that total will only continue to grow.

USE A MACHETE TO CUT THROUGH THE OVERGROWN VINES.

» [PC] You can keep up with the Joneses, fighting your way through the Emperor's Tomb.

44948
204980
einforced Wall. Hinders enemy tunnelling and improves your Dungeon. Health: 100%
Reinforced Wall
8727
0
50

» [PC] One of GOG.com's best all-time sellers is Bullfrog's classic *Dungeon Keeper 2*

fact that the site now offers more recent indie titles, and some new AAA releases also available alongside the classic PC games. Pricing is also a significant factor in GOG.com's success story. There are special offers, and various sales throughout the year, based upon genres, developers, publishers, or particular game series. And the company mantra remains the same. "You buy it, install a very simple package and the game just works," says Marcin Paczynski. "On top of that you are getting the manuals, and everything else that is available for a game. You are getting all of this as well. A collector's edition experience."

Collector is a word that crops up a few times when GOG.com describes what it is doing. It's a trait that many retro gamers will recognise in themselves. Gamers love to collect games as much as playing them. It's a personality profile that fits many of GOG.com's customers, which, by the way, is a term not used by GOG.com itself. They aren't customers, or consumers. They are gamers, pure and simple. "You also get the technical support if you can't get a game to run, and you also become part of our community online, not only so we can help resolve issues, but the community also helps us to get games released in the best possible way," adds Marcin Paczynski. "With each release we put out, we want it to be the best possible version available. If we didn't, our community would be the first to point out that we forgot about this wallpaper that was added to the Swedish edition, or whatever," he adds, laughing.

The longer you talk to the people at GOG.com, the more apparent it becomes that the passion and the drive behind what they do proliferates throughout the company. The games and the wraparound service that GOG.com provides is clearly something that runs through the veins of all who work there. For example, the addition of the GOG.com Galaxy app and including cloud save functionality if an Internet connection is active gives gamers a consistent and transparent experience when playing a GOG.com-sourced game.

"There are people out there who care about games, and do want to make them last forever," says Maciej. "If they believe in the cost involved to preserve games, then they are helping us. We at GOG.com perceive games as a form of art, like a cultural heritage. If someone asks, 'Why is a game worth preserving?' we think of it in the same way as someone looking at a painting from a thousand years ago and asking the same thing. If someone cares about it, then it is worth preserving, it is important. Obviously we are running an e-commerce company, but deep down for me, we know there are millions of people who are a tiny bit happier because of what we do."

"Often people say, 'I grew up with that title,' and for us that is proof enough that games should be preserved and that lots of people really still care about them in the same way as great movies, great books, great pieces of art," concludes Marcin Paczynski. Amen to that. ✱

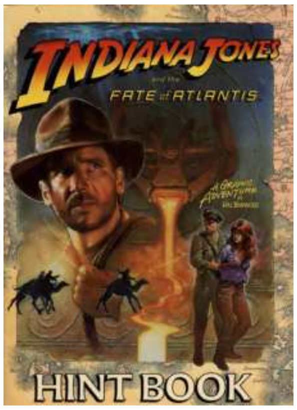
ABOUT
COMMUNITY
SUPPORT
Community
General Forums

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

■ The GOG.com community is vital. Support from fellow gamers, and continual engagement with the community keeps GOG.com on its toes, as it strives to make the experience as good as possible. New releases of old games are driven by the community's online Wishlist.

EXTRAS

■ Not only are you getting an old game that just works on a modern OS, but you are also getting the manuals, the posters, maps, key guides and other documentation that originally came in the box. Sometimes you also get some extras, including hint books.


INDIANA JONES and the FATE of ATLANTIS
HINT BOOK

PC DVD
THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
12+
EA GAMES

» GOG.com's community hopes that popular games like *LOTR: The Battle For Middle Earth* might be added in the future.

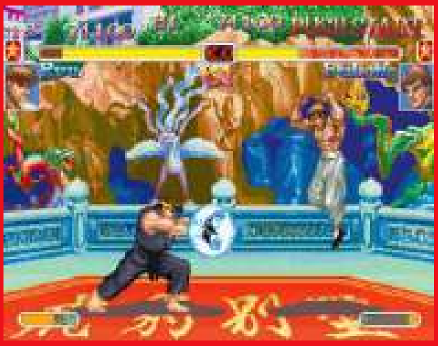
Real Pad Soldier fact

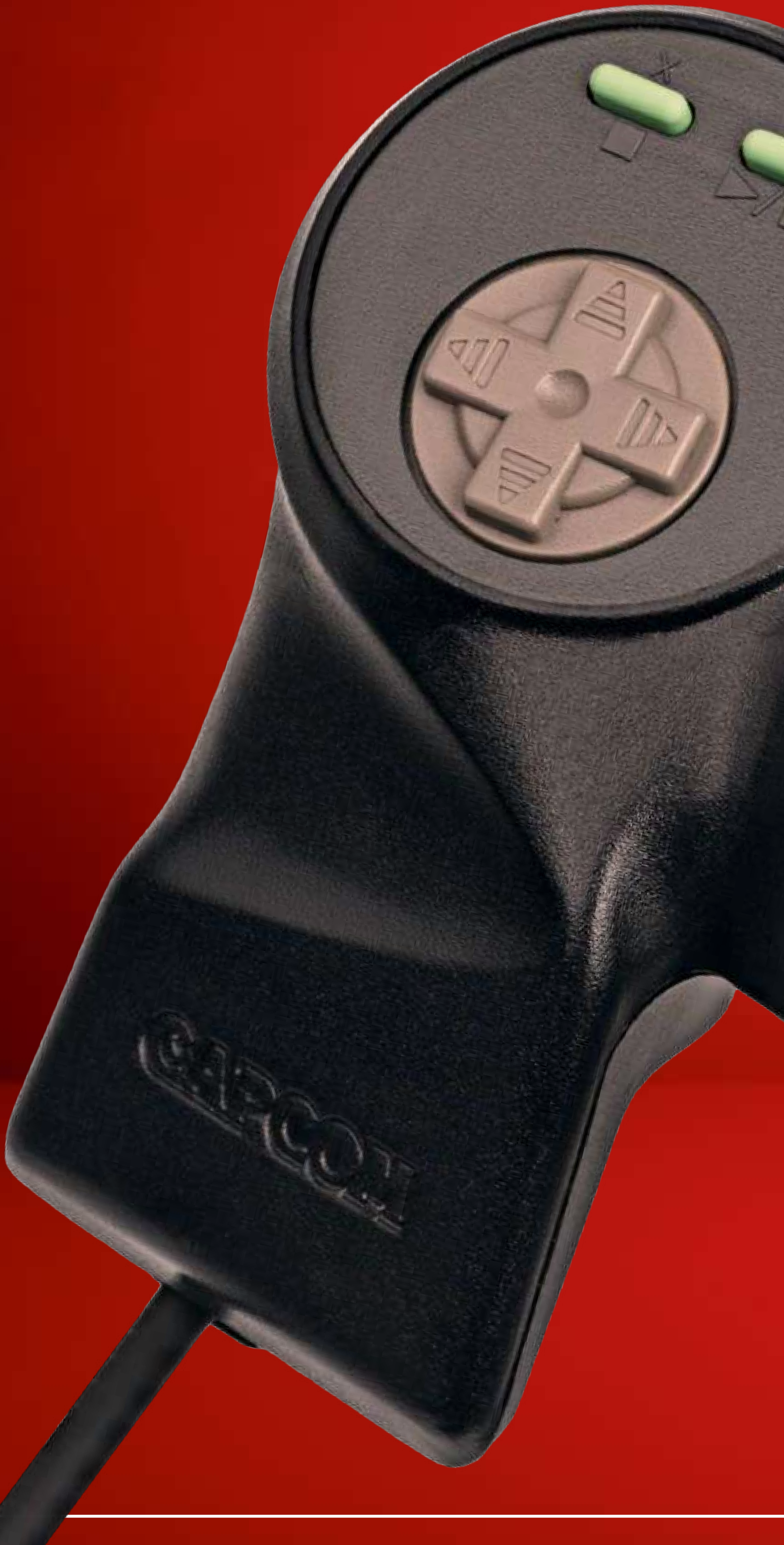
■ This wasn't the only Pad Soldier model – the Capcom Pad Soldier and Capcom Pad Soldier MD were also available for the SNES and Mega Drive respectively.

ESSENTIAL GAME

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

3DO owners really had something to boast about when Capcom's arcade classic came to their platform. No home version of the game to date had been closer to the arcade experience, and it was even the very latest version with the super combos – other platforms were generally stuck with versions of the original *Super Street Fighter II*. It wasn't quite arcade perfect, with the most noticeable difference being the lack of parallax scrolling in backgrounds, but it was more than enough to inspire jealousy in the owners of 16-bit machines.



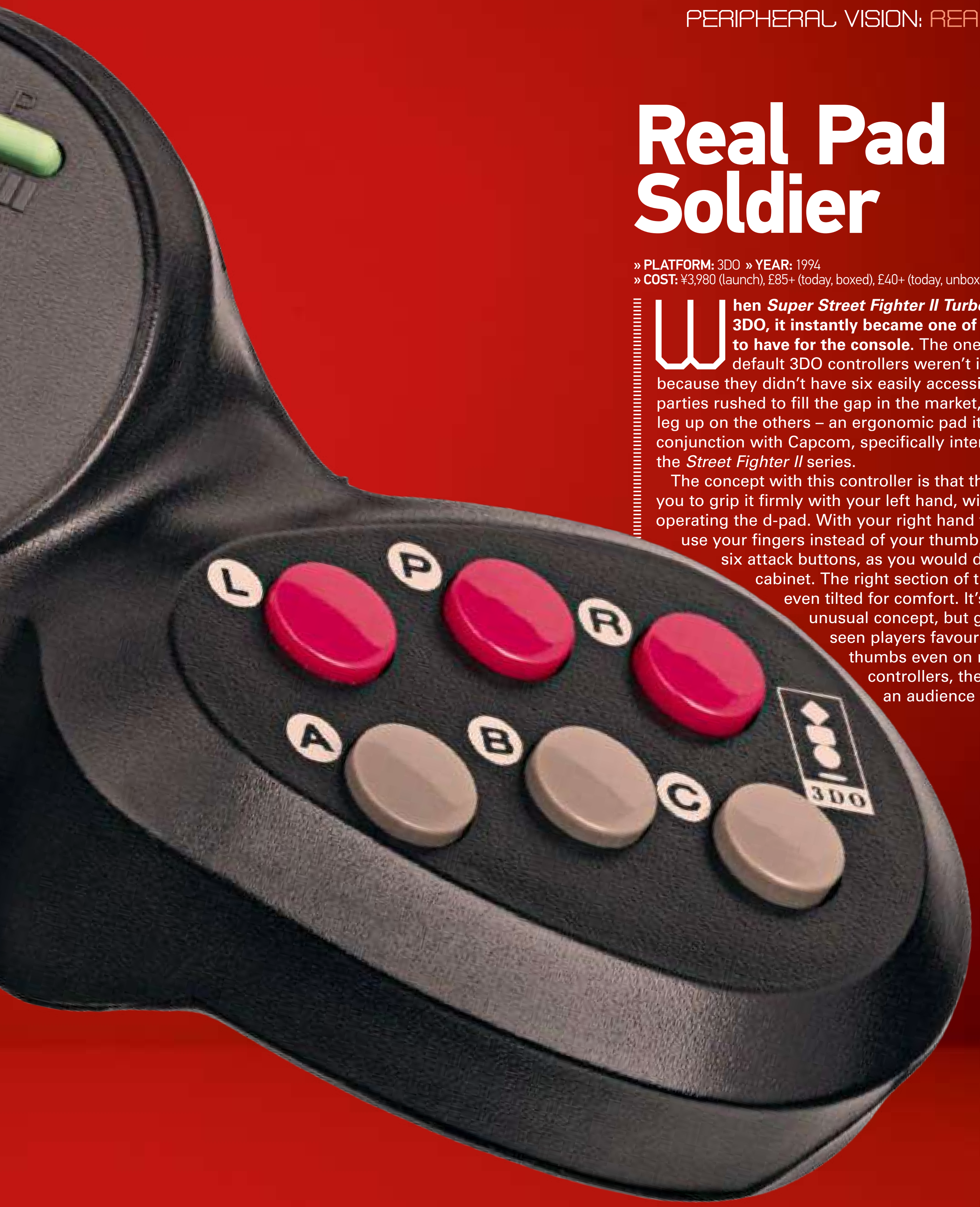


Real Pad Soldier

» PLATFORM: 3DO **» YEAR:** 1994
» COST: ¥3,980 (launch), £85+ (today, boxed), £40+ (today, unboxed)

When *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* arrived on the 3DO, it instantly became one of the hottest games to have for the console. The one snag was that the default 3DO controllers weren't ideal for the game because they didn't have six easily accessible buttons. Third parties rushed to fill the gap in the market, but ASCII had a leg up on the others – an ergonomic pad it had designed in conjunction with Capcom, specifically intended for use with the *Street Fighter II* series.

The concept with this controller is that the handle allows you to grip it firmly with your left hand, with that thumb operating the d-pad. With your right hand free, you can then use your fingers instead of your thumb to access the six attack buttons, as you would do on an arcade cabinet. The right section of the controller is even tilted for comfort. It's certainly an unusual concept, but given that we've seen players favouring fingers over thumbs even on regular six-button controllers, there's undeniably an audience for it. *



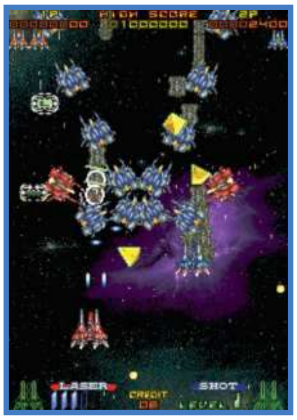
SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ULTIMATE GUIDE

RAYFORCE

TAITO HAS AN EXEMPLARY RECORD WHEN IT COMES TO CRAFTING EXCITING SHMUPS, BUT A CONFUSING CHOICE OF NAMES ACROSS DIFFERENT REGIONS MEANS THAT ONE OF ITS BEST PROBABLY ISN'T AS WELL-KNOWN AS IT SHOULD BE. RETRO GAMER FLIES IN TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES



» [Arcade] Two-player games get quite hectic, so keep an eye on enemy waves and your teammate.

Games are often known by different names across international regions and Taito's confusingly named shmup is a good example. Originally known as *Layer Section* during development, the 1994 game eventually debuted in Japanese arcades as *RayForce*, before being renamed to *Gunlock* for the European markets. By the time *RayForce* made its way to the Saturn a licensing dispute meant its name reverted back to *Layer Section*. Its name changed yet again for its Western release, to the rather pedestrian-sounding *Galactic Attack*. Thankfully, *RayForce* is amazing no matter what moniker you know it by.

The success of *Street Fighter II* in arcades meant that the market was saturated by one-on-one fighters during the mid-Nineties. According to Shmuplations.com's informative *RayForce* making of, Taito's arcade division was split into three teams at the time: one based in Yokohama, one in Osaka, while the *RayForce* team was based in Saitama as part of the Kumagaya Research Group. The company wasn't interested in making an STG (Shooting Game) and told each team that they would be working on games based on other genres instead. Tatsuo Nakamura, *RayForce*'s director, designer and programmer wasn't happy with this decision and pushed ahead with his STG project. After presenting it during a meeting, Nakamura got the go-ahead to make his game.

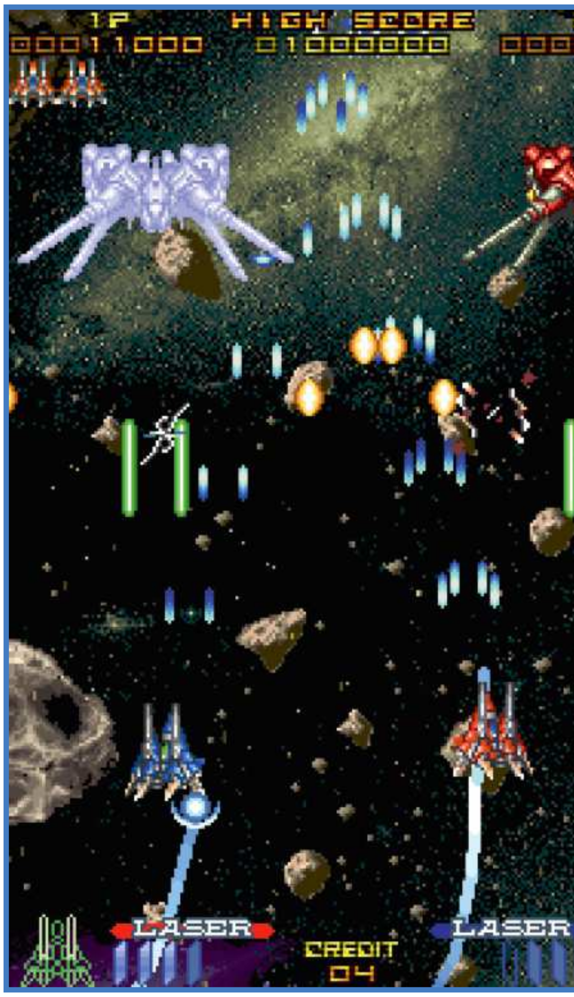
> "WHEN PLAYING RAYFORCE, PURITY IS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND"

When playing *RayForce*, purity is the first thing that comes to mind. It's arguably everything most players love about the shoot-'em-up genre, but distilled into its simplest form. There are no complicated power-ups to master, no curtains of bullets to navigate (although it does get quite hectic on later levels) and, somewhat controversially, no smart bombs to hide behind once things inevitably get tough – it's just pure unadulterated blasting and it works exceptionally well.

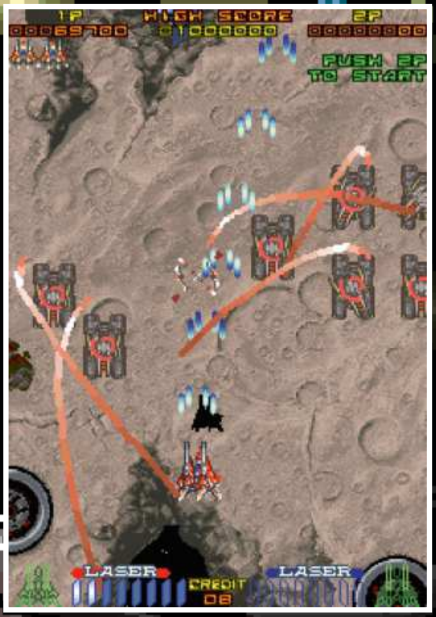
At the heart of *RayForce*'s intense shooting is the lock-on laser of your RVA-818 X-LAY, which is guided by an aiming reticule similar to games like Namco's *Xevious*. As with *Xevious* the action of *RayForce* takes place on two planes and you'll use conventional guns to take out any enemies on the same field as you, while destroying any enemies below you. While *Xevious* and similar games used bombs, *RayForce* utilises lock-on homing lasers instead. Granted, it's not the most original game mechanic, but it's the implementation that makes *RayForce* feel so satisfying to play. While you can simply loose off lasers to tackle enemies as they appear, you'll soon understand the benefit of letting the playing area fill up with foes.

Your ship can initially lock-on to five targets at once and you'll soon notice that your score increases with every extra kill. Grab one of the green power-ups that occasionally appears and you'll be able to increase the lock-on capabilities further – your craft will eventually be able to fire off eight lasers at once, which dramatically boosts your scoring potential. Of course, the longer you let enemies lazily drift through your gunsights, the more chance they have of returning fire, so *RayForce* becomes an interesting case of risk vs reward where you're constantly trying to attain the most optimal score while making sure that the screen doesn't become overrun with enemies and bullets.

While your lock-on homing lasers are your most spectacular-looking weapon, it's certainly not the only firepower you have at your disposal and you'll find the aforementioned guns will be doing plenty of work as well. Thankfully, you can increase your craft's overall fire by either collecting a single yellow power-up or ▶



» [Arcade] The opening level of *RayForce* starts off in deep space, with the fight eventually moving to Earth.


1P
00069700
HIGH SCORE
01000000
2P
00000000
PUSH 2P
TO START
LASER
CREDIT
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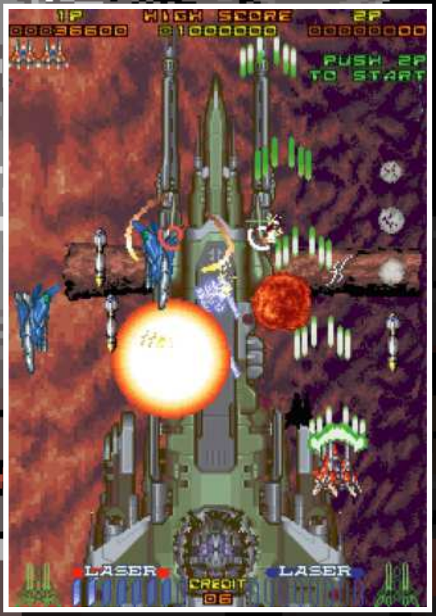
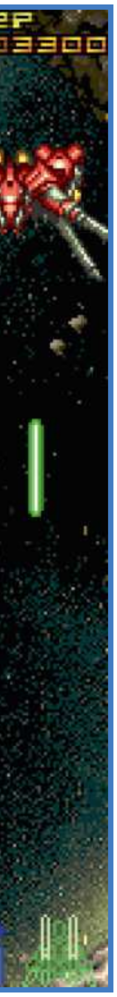
LASER

» [Arcade] While *RayForce*'s lock-on system shares similarities with Namco's *Xevious*, mechanically it's very different.

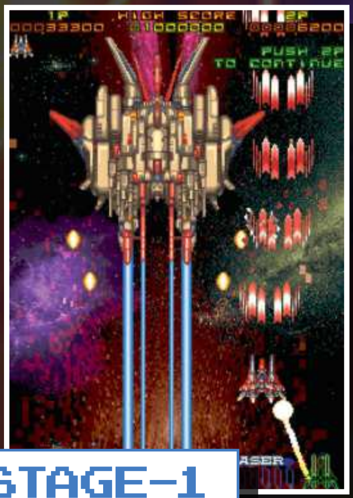

1P
00036600
HIGH SCORE
01000000
2P
00000000
PUSH 2P
TO START
LASER
CREDIT
06
LASER

» [Arcade] *RayForce* introduces mini-bosses from its second stage. The irony of course is that many are not mini at all.



BOSS RUSH

HOW TO TAKE DOWN RAYFORCE'S METALLIC BEHEMOTHS

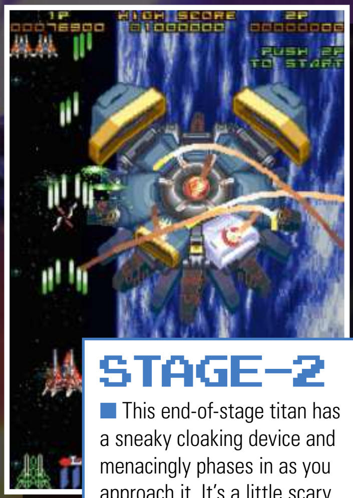


1P
HIGH SCORE
2P
PUSH 2P TO CONTINUE
LASER

STAGE-1

This large ship is docked when you first encounter it, but it soon detaches its docking cables so it can give you a good hiding.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Avoid its bullets and quickly take out its larger wings. Once that's done, it's a case of pounding its body while avoiding its deadly plasma fire.

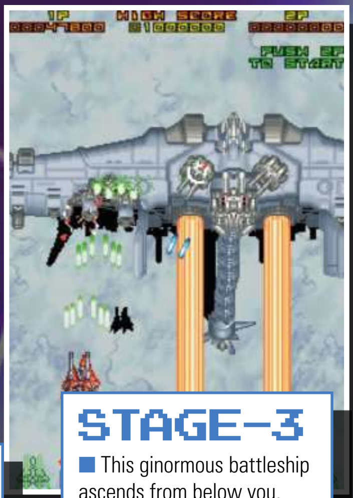


1P
HIGH SCORE
2P
PUSH 2P TO START

STAGE-2

This end-of-stage titan has a sneaky cloaking device and menacingly phases in as you approach it. It's a little scary.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Take out its two gun emplacements with your standard fire and lock-on when you can. It will occasionally phase out, but your lock-on lasers will still work.

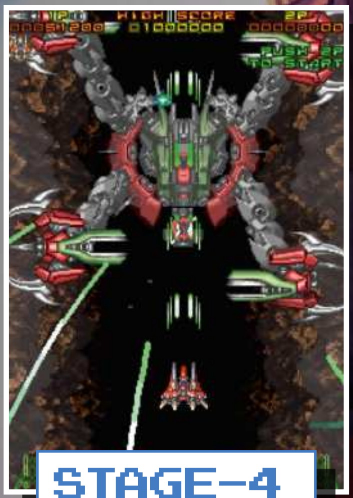


1P
HIGH SCORE
2P
PUSH 2P TO START

STAGE-3

This ginormous battleship ascends from below you, breaking through the clouds to reveal its frighteningly massive size.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Try and avoid fire from its mounted guns and concentrate your own fire on its weird-looking tail. Avoid its jet engines and you should be golden.

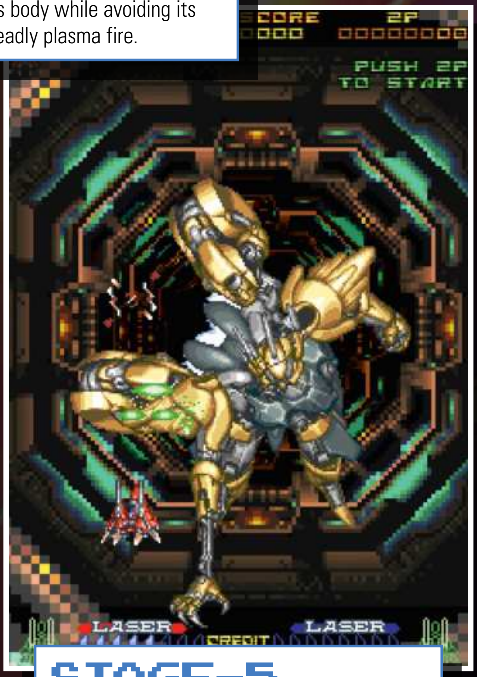


1P
HIGH SCORE
2P
PUSH 2P TO START

STAGE-4

Your next adversary is found underground and uses giant hulking claws to power through the earth. Be careful!

HOW TO BEAT IT: This boss is tough as it spits out homing lasers from its claws and spews out small bullets that explode. Disable its claws to turn the tide of battle.

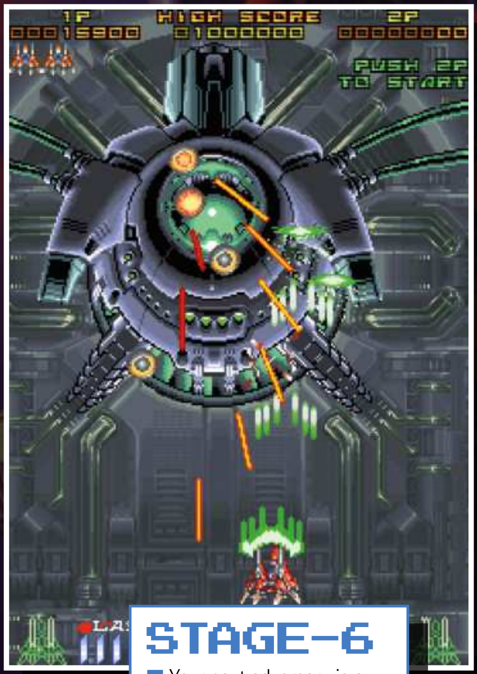


SCORE
2P
PUSH 2P TO START
LASER
CREDIT
LASER

STAGE-5

As you descend downwards an airlock opens and a massive gold mech springs out. Unfortunately for you, it's spoiling for a fight.

HOW TO BEAT IT: After spitting out lightning and countless bullets it will attempt to punch you into submission. It's a tough scrap but perseverance is key to your survival.



1P
HIGH SCORE
2P
00015900
01000000
00000000
PUSH 2P TO START

STAGE-6

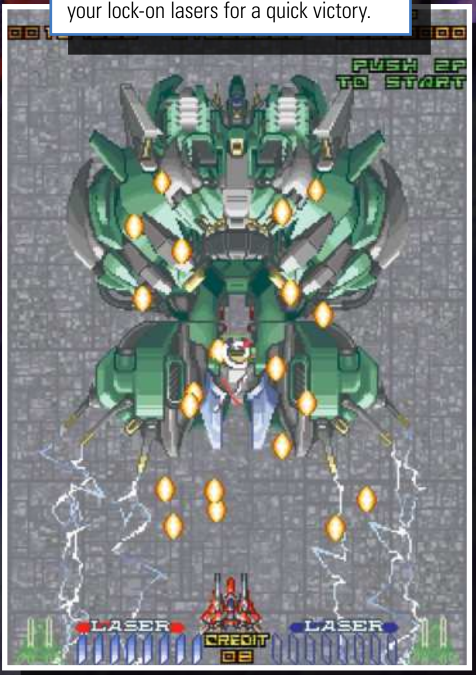
Your next adversary is a huge weapon that sits atop a tall metallic tower. Another tough fight lies ahead of you.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Its sides chuck out mines so disable those first. It also spits out annoying orbs that spew lasers and hammers you with plasmas. Tough, but beatable.

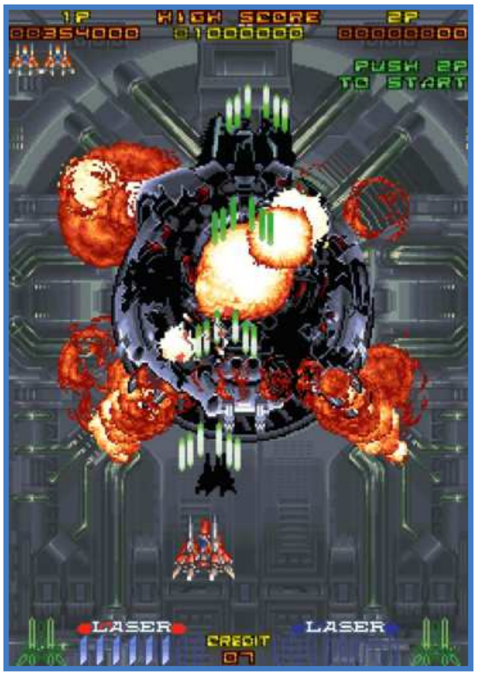
STAGE-7

Shimmering as it moves into position, this final ship is certainly fierce-looking but it does have weaknesses.

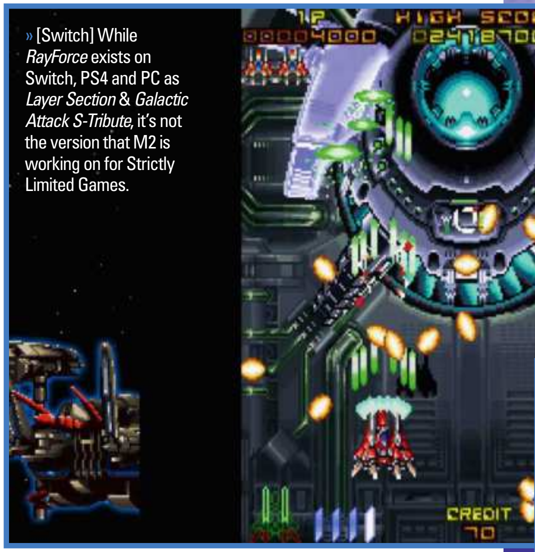
HOW TO BEAT IT: The lightning can't hurt you so get as close as you dare and pummel its front, which will soon break off. Avoid its sheets of bullets and use your lock-on lasers for a quick victory.



PUSH 2P TO START
LASER
CREDIT
08
LASER



» [Arcade] Everyone loves a good explosion and *RayForce* is full of them.



» [Switch] While *RayForce* exists on Switch, PS4 and PC as *Layer Section* & *Galactic Attack S-Tribute*, it's not the version that M2 is working on for Strictly Limited Games.

nabbing three red ones – once powered up your guns will soon rip through the defences of even the most heavily armoured boss.

Less is certainly more in the case of *RayForce* and the decision by Nakamura and his team to not bog their game down with complicated game mechanics or fancy power-ups, simply lets the purity of *RayForce*'s immensely satisfying shooting mechanics shine through. While it may appear somewhat stripped down compared to other shooters from the era, you certainly don't notice when your back's against the wall and you're blissfully taking out everything that's being thrown at you.

If *RayForce*'s game mechanics are toned down, the same can't be said for its beautiful aesthetics. Powered by Taito's F3 System, the same 32-bit board that energised the likes of *Elevator Action Returns* and *Bubble Symphony*, *RayForce* is an absolute graphical treat for the eyes. Although it's filled with all manner of trickery to make it look like your fighter is flying over pseudo 3D landscapes, virtually everything in the game is sprite-based.

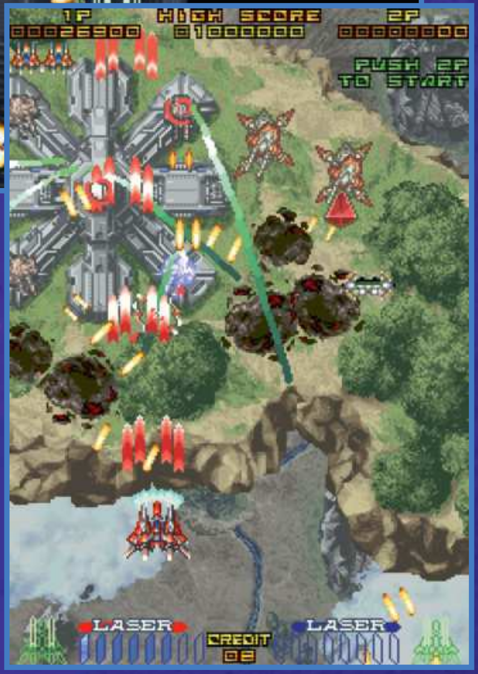
"IF RAYFORCE'S GAME MECHANICS ARE TONED DOWN, THE SAME CAN'T BE SAID FOR ITS BEAUTIFUL AESTHETICS"

That pain-staking sprite work is particularly noticeable not only in *RayForce*'s striking-looking bosses, but also in the environments you fight over, which include detailed cityscapes, enormous stretches of water and scorched planets. Epic space battles take place below as you hurtle through *RayForce*'s first stage, mammoth mechanical soldiers zoom up from lower levels to attack you one on one, while clumps of land will tumble down into nothingness if you take out the structures holding them in place. From a colossal wave of dust that heralds the approach of an attacking craft on stage two, to the intricate detail found in the shaft you descend down as you fight stage five's gargantuan boss, everything about *RayForce*'s world feels real and lived-in, and it's a delight to explore.

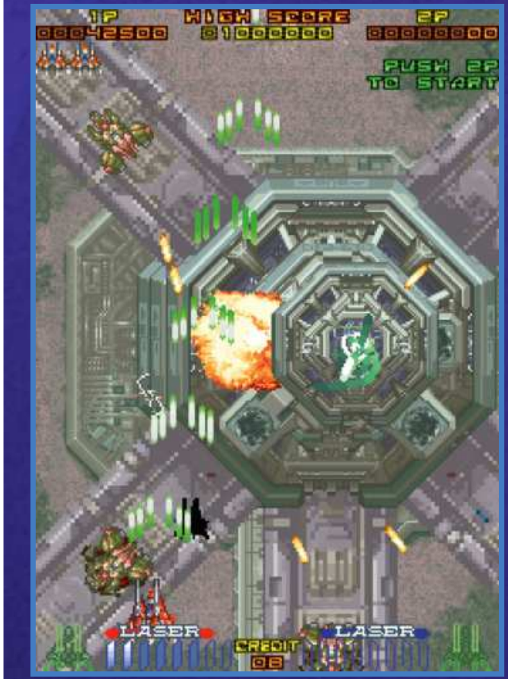
That journey is enhanced further by the fact that your trek through *RayForce* is continuous. There are no breaks at the end of a level like in a traditional shooter, instead your journey continues with the title of the new level briefly showing up on-screen as you carry on your epic quest towards Earth, which has now been taken over by a dangerous supercomputer called Con-Human.

Equally impressive is *RayForce*'s dynamic soundtrack, a truly rousing affair created by Taito's in-house music band Zuntata. The tune on the opening stage is particularly memorable, but later levels sound just as good and it's not unusual to be tapping away with your foot while you mow down enemies with your guns and lasers. *RayForce*'s aural majesty extends to its excellent sound effects as well, creating an exciting wall of sound that perfectly complements the chaotic on-screen action.

After lighting up arcades, *RayForce* appeared on Sega's Saturn in 1995 courtesy of Ving and it's pretty much arcade perfect, adding a Tate option, a Red Book audio soundtrack and a useful rapid-fire option. A PC port arrived in 1997, while mobile versions appeared on iOS and Android in 2012 and 2017, respectively. Taito's magnificent shooter has also cropped up on various Taito compilations, the Astro City Mini V and is even available on contemporary systems like the PS4 and Switch (with a physical release on the way courtesy of Strictly Limited Games). So even if you've never had a chance to experience Taito's spectacular shooter before there's never been a better time to discover it. ▶



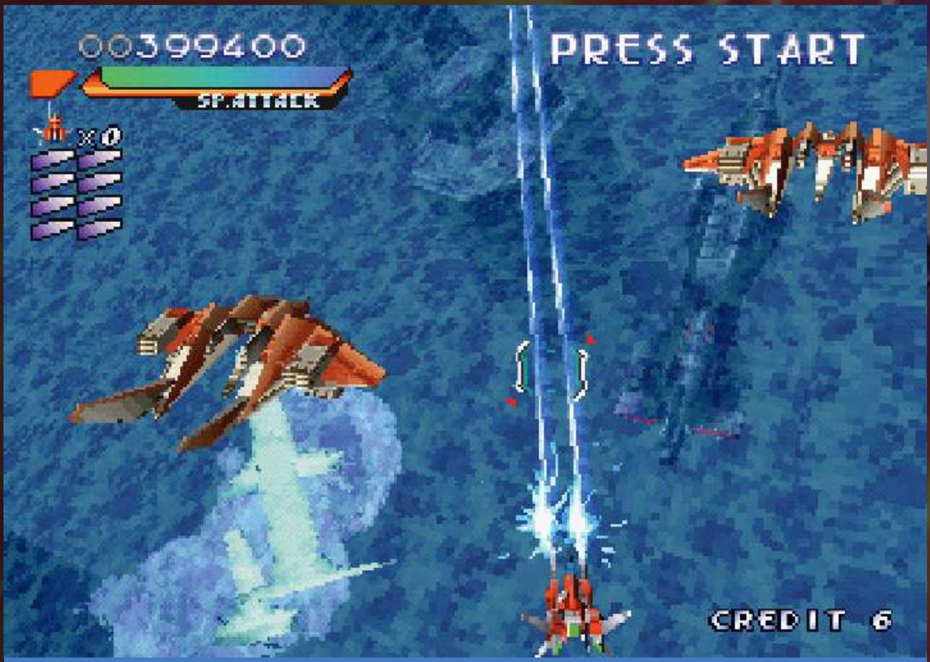
» [Arcade] Watching lasers snake downwards to destroy ground forces never gets boring.



» [Arcade] Clever layering like with this tower means *RayForce* looks almost three dimensional at times.

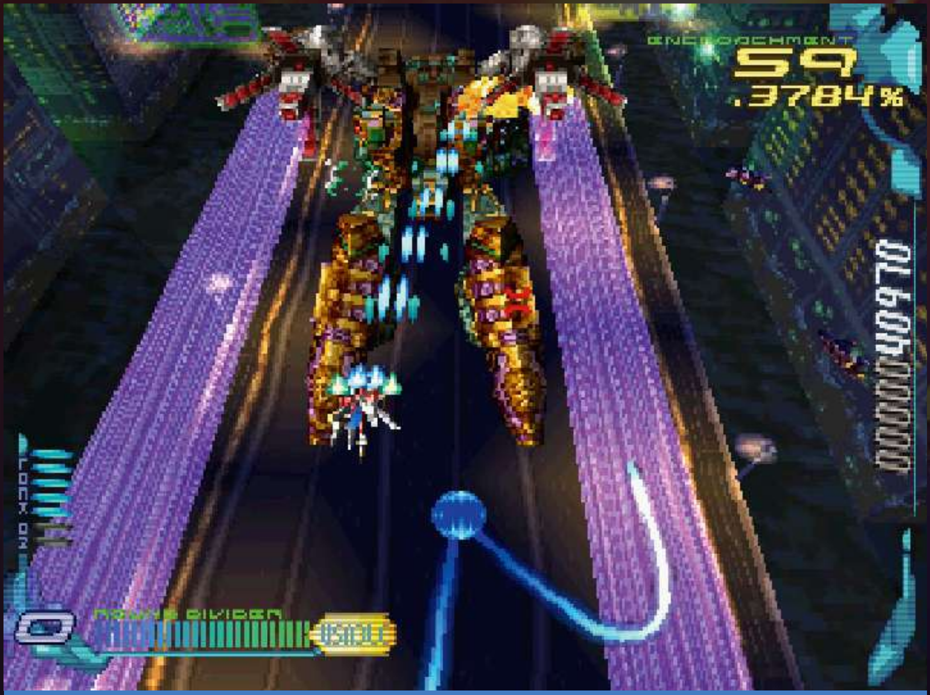
BEYOND RAYFORCE

REVISITING TAITO'S ENTERTAINING SEQUELS



RAYSTORM

Taito made numerous tweaks for *RayForce*'s sequel. The exceptional sprites from the first game were replaced with polygons and although the game still scrolls vertically, the playing area is far wider. Interestingly, the arcade game includes an additional ship as well as a smart bomb-like Special Attack. This time, the PlayStation received a port alongside the Saturn and both include numerous extras that weren't in the arcade original, including a third ship. Both versions are highly recommended.



RAYCRISIS

The third and final game in the *RayForce* series is actually a prequel that explains the origins of Con-Human (*RayStorm* ignores the plot of the first game entirely). Like *RayStorm* it features polygon graphics, but now adds an enhanced Special Attack and numerous other subtle changes to the core gameplay. The biggest difference is the new Encroachment Gauge, which starts at 50 percent and constantly rises unless you kill enemies to lower it. The lower it is, the more points you score. Like *RayStorm*, it received ports to Saturn and PlayStation and also has an Extras mode.

» M2's Naoki Horii is working hard on the incoming *Ray'Z Arcade Chronology*. Photo credit: My Life In Gaming

DEVELOPER Q&A

TAITO AND M2 ON REMASTERING THE RAY SERIES

If you're hankering after some *RayForce* action you'll be interested to hear that Taito is working alongside M2 and Strictly Limited Games to bring the original arcade trilogy to Switch and PS4. Taito's Yuichi Toyama and M2's Naoki Horii explain what's involved.

Why revisit the* RayForce *series after all this time?

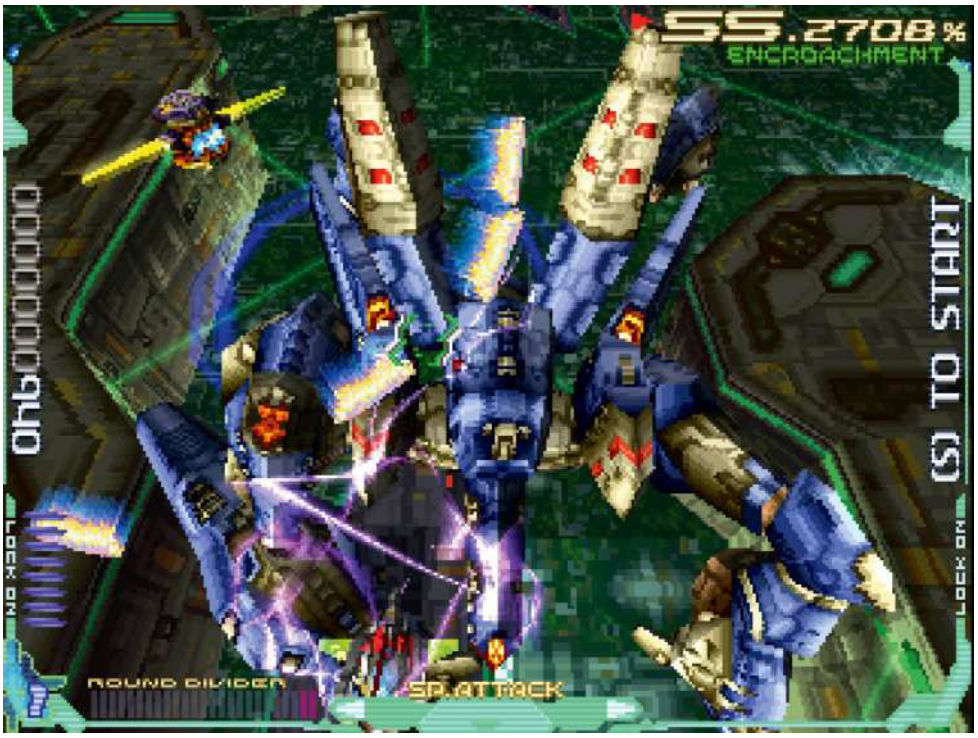
Yuichi Toyama: Personally, I would have preferred to release the *Ray* series before *Darius*, but naturally, we have to give priority to more popular franchises which fans are waiting for. I also believe that M2 is the most knowledgeable developer in the world right now when it comes to multi-platform ports of the Taito F3 and FX systems.

Naoki Horii: I think the reason for the wait is that you can't release the *Ray* series before *Darius*… and that's all I can say about that. That's not to say the *Ray* series is inferior to *Darius*; we wanted to get our hands on it to the extent we even offered to release it through our *M2 Shot Triggers* line. We never dreamed we'd be able to work on a collection with games from three different system boards.

How long have the remasters taken and what technical hurdles have you faced?

YT: We started talking to M2 about this before the first master delivery of *G-Darius HD*, and I believe they'd been doing R&D around the F3 and FX systems even before that. In that sense, I think the production took over two years, maybe more.

NH: We've been looking at the F3 system, FX system, and Taito G-NET for a long time, even before Taito talked to us, so we've poured a fair amount of time into this. I think that



» [Arcade] *RayCrisis* is actually a prequel and explains how the supercomputer Con-Human came to be.

reproducing the sound system has probably taken more time and effort than you'd imagine. I hope the time we spent on this project will be reflected in the degree of perfection we achieve and how satisfied players are with it.

RayForce *is also known as* Layer Section, Galactic Attack *and* Gunlock, *what's your favourite name for it?*

YT: As a player, I'm most familiar with the title as it was when I first encountered the game: *RayForce*. I think it's a simple and beautiful title, reflecting the power (Force) of a beam of light (Ray), which is representative of the game's nature. Games, of course, don't have a 'gender', but if anything, I've always thought of the *Ray* series as feminine, and that comes across in the pronunciation of the titles. I believe whoever was in charge at the time went with the more masculine-sounding *Galactic Attack* and *Gunlock* for the international releases to increase sales.

NH: It was all about that eye-catchingly beautiful laser, so *RayForce* is still a good fit. *Gunlock* is a title I learned about later, but I think it is rugged and cool.

What improvements have you made over the original games?

NH: We're trying to make it possible to finish the game without giving up by adding various additional features. Since the game is originally from the arcade, we'd love it if this release provides the chance for people to finish the game who wanted to do that in the arcade, or those who never quite made it.

Input lag is an issue many fans are sensitive to now; what will you be doing to combat this?

NH: We're trying to achieve zero latency in the core game code. On top of that, we'll be attempting until the very last minute to reduce latency on the UI side and gadgets as much as possible. There's a lot of tweaks we can come up with, and we'll continue this challenge in the future.

What's your favourite game in the series and why?

YT: That would have to be *RayForce*. Up until then, there had been several anime and videogames that featured curving beams, but *RayForce* was the first game that allowed players to fire them in the form of lock-on lasers, and it was a big shock when it was released to the world.

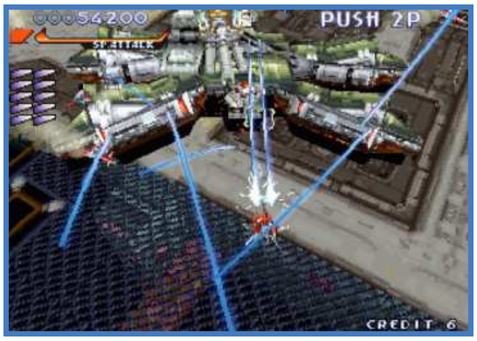
Why does the RayForce *series remain so popular?*

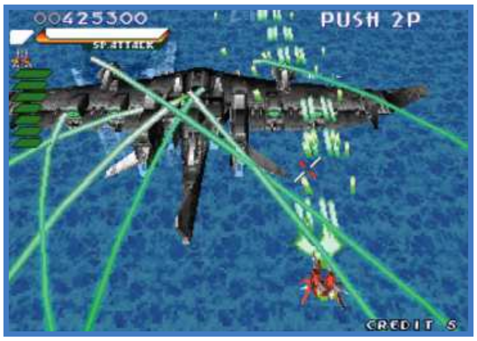
YT: I think it's down to the lock-on system-centred gameplay, the worldview depicted throughout the series, and Tamayo [Kawamoto]'s soundscape. Alone, each part is of a high quality, but when the player joins this combination, the total is more than the sum of its parts and it creates something special that other series don't have.

NH: One reason is the quality of its graphics. I was one of those who the game captivated with its beautiful lasers. I also think that the fact that the [series] received solid ports to both Sega Saturn and PlayStation played a role in increasing the fanbase. The workmanship shows that the developers put their heart and soul into the ports, and the Saturn's *RayStorm* (*Layer Section II*) also shows their desire to overcome as many of the difficulties as possible a port from PlayStation-compatible arcade hardware to the Saturn causes. *

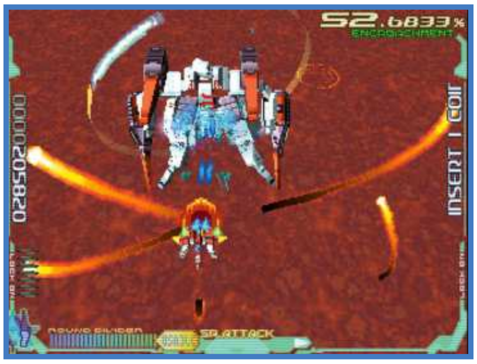
COLLECTOR'S EDITION
Ray'z Arcade Chronology

» Strictly Limited Games' *Ray'Z Arcade Chronology* is available now on Switch and PS4. Visit store.strictlylimitedgames.com





» [Arcade] There are plenty of big ships to take down in *RayStorm*. Thankfully, your lasers are more than up to the task.



» [Arcade] *RayCrisis*' Encroachment Gauge starts at 50% and continually rises as more enemies appear. Shoot enemies to lower it.

00379700
PUSH 2P
SP.ATTACK
CREDIT 6

» [Arcade] M2 has a good reputation for low input lag in its games, so expect something similar for *Ray'Z Arcade Chronology*.

Dragon Ball Z: Super Saiya Densetsu

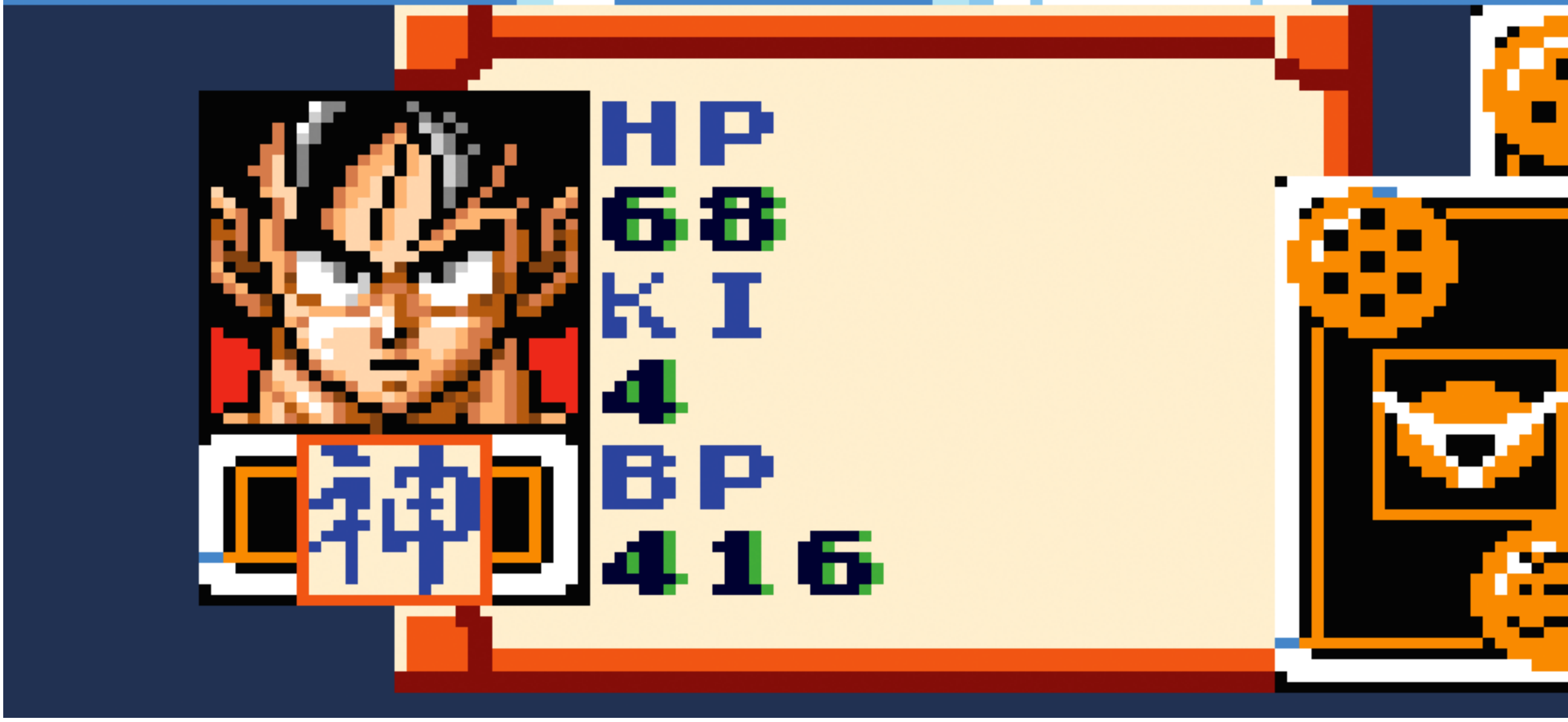
BALL Z BREAKTIME ANTICS

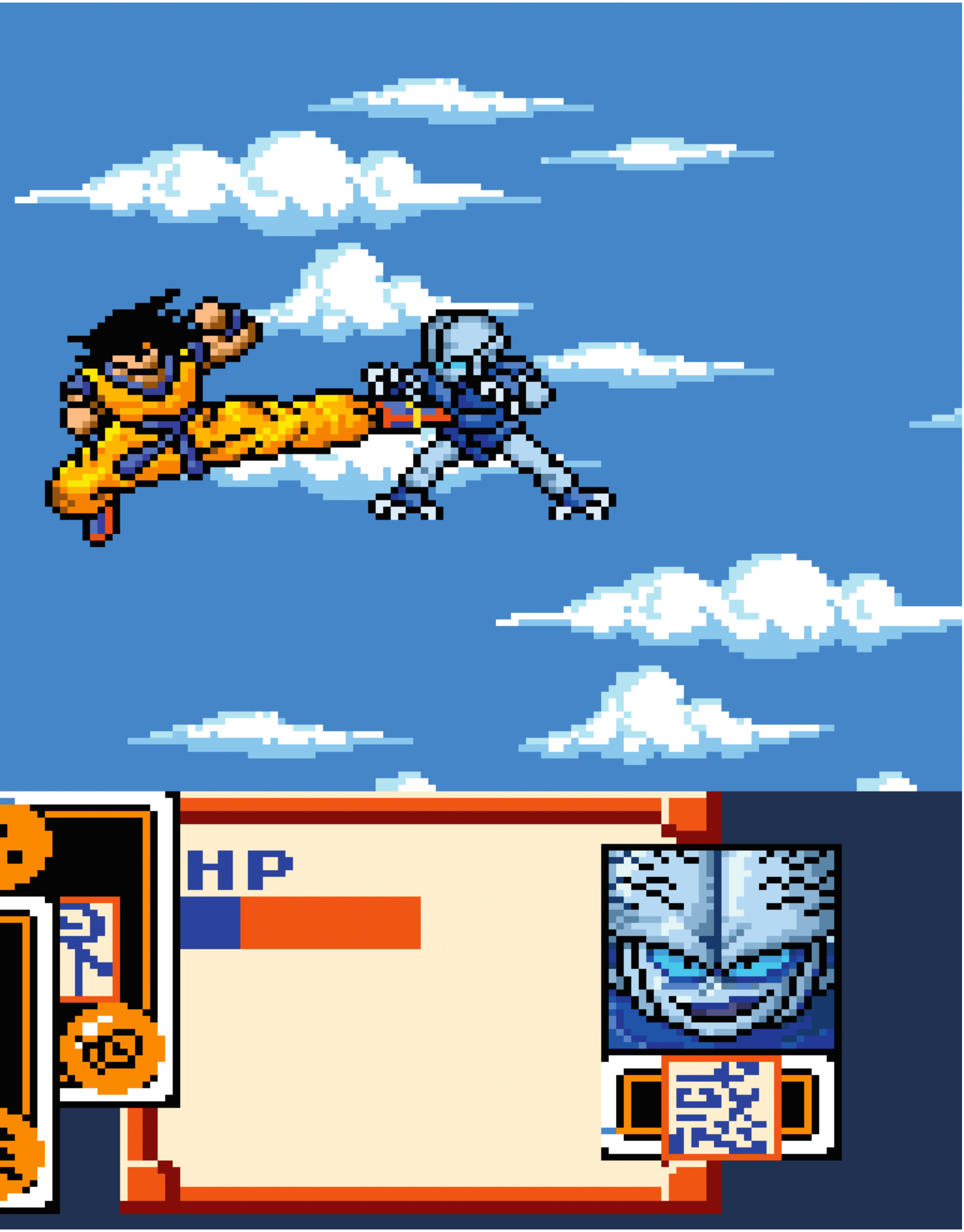
» SNES » 1992 » TOSE

When my secondary school got a shipment of new Windows 98 PCs at the turn of the Millennium, it was quite the event. The school hadn't exactly been on the cutting edge of technology when I'd started, as there was still one computing classroom full of BBC Micros, and it was still blissfully naive to the need for dedicated IT staff. That meant that we only had basic online content filters to contend with, which were soon bypassed, and we had a surprising amount of access to run programs. The result was that for a brief, shining moment, half the boys in the school were suddenly retro gamers.

Emulators were all the rage, and many used them to go back to *Sonic 2* or *Super Mario World* – already nostalgic favourites in the era of unstoppable hype for the launch of the PS2. However, this all happened to coincide with a boom period for anime and I spotted one friend playing a fighting game based on *Dragon Ball Z*, which was becoming hugely popular. I asked him what it was and where I could get it, and promptly went and got a completely different *Dragon Ball Z* game by mistake.

Not only was it a remake of a Famicom RPG with a card-based fighting system that I couldn't even begin to figure out, but the English translation was a little incoherent and noticeably incomplete. Yes, this was my first-ever experience with a fan translation, and as limited as it was, I was happy enough trying to make some kind of sense of it though because a familiar licence can be a powerful thing. I never got very far with it though, as the school soon removed our ability to unzip files, essentially rendering all of our downloads useless. Without a PC of my own at home to continue on, I was soon back to watching Goku's adventures on Cartoon Network. *



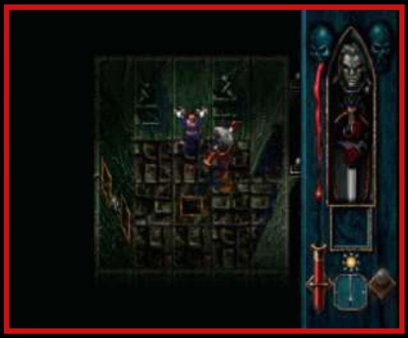

HP

THE HISTORY OF

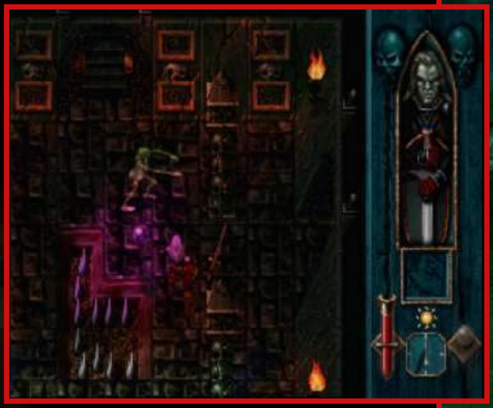
LEGACY OF KAIN

UNCHARTED'S CREATIVE DIRECTOR AMY HENNIG WAS BEHIND THREE OF THE FIVE LEGACY OF KAIN GAMES, AND THE SERIES' COMPLEX LORE AND REWARDING GAMEPLAY HAVE GAINED IT SOME DEVOTED FANS. BUT THE FIRST GAME UNDERWENT A DIFFICULT BIRTH...

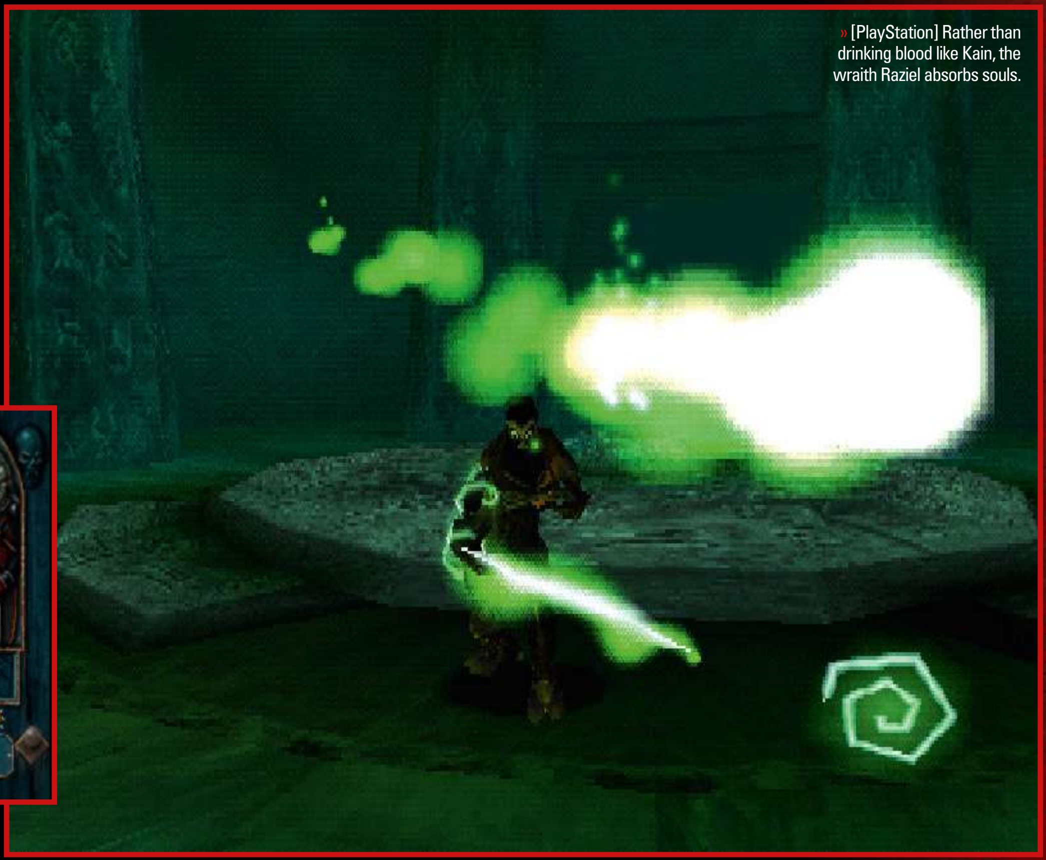
WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD



» [PlayStation] Chained prisoners serve as tasty, health-giving snacks for a vampire on the go. ombat.



» [PlayStation] Whereas later games in the series were in 3D, *Blood Omen* has a top-down 2D viewpoint.



» [PlayStation] Rather than drinking blood like Kain, the wraith Raziel absorbs souls.

» Jason Epps worked as a lead designer for Crystal Dynamics during the making of *Blood Omen: Legacy Of Kain*. He left the company towards the end of that game's development, but recently returned to work on the future of *Tomb Raider*.

» Jimi Doss worked as a designer on *Nosgoth* at Psyonix, and later contributed to the development of *Rocket League*. He now works as a senior producer at PlayStation Studios, and is currently working on *MLB: The Show*.

The story of the *Legacy Of Kain* series is fascinating, complicated and full of conflict – much like the famously lore-heavy and brutal stories of the games themselves. Five *Legacy Of Kain* games were released between 1996 and 2003, and although the series never achieved true blockbuster sales, it has always had a devoted cult following. *Legacy Of Kain* was doing the dark, brooding anti-hero thing years before games like *God Of War* and *Darksiders*, and the rich, vampiric lore that underpins it all is eminently rewarding to get your teeth into (so to speak).

The first game in the series – *Blood Omen: Legacy Of Kain* – was created by Canadian studio Silicon Knights, which developed the concept for what was initially called *The Pillars Of Nosgoth* in around 1993. Key inspirations for the game included the *Necroscope* series of horror novels by Brian Lumley, which feature a vampire-dominated parallel world, and *The Wheel Of Time*, an intricately plotted series of fantasy novels by Robert Jordan. Game director Denis Dyack has also described the Clint Eastwood movie *Unforgiven* as a key influence, with its blurring of the lines between good and bad characters. The name itself was inspired by the title of Ken Follett's historical novel *The Pillars Of The Earth*.

Crystal Dynamics soon signed on to publish the game, and initially it was being considered as a 3DO title (the Californian firm was one of the 3DO's key developers, releasing titles like *Crash 'N Burn* and *Total Eclipse*). However, it was quickly decided that Silicon Knights should instead target Sony's new PlayStation console.

It's fair to say that the development of *Blood Omen* was troubled. Jason Epps was hired by Crystal Dynamics as a lead designer around eight months into the project, and he recalls being sent up to Canada on regular two-week stints to sort out issues with the build. "We kept running into the same problem, which is – with no disrespect at all – a very big world with not enough in it," he says. "The game was really, really large. When we got the first playable build, it was just vast. I remember Denis Dyack saying at the time it was four times the size of the *Zelda* world." Part of Jason's mission was to bring this world down to a more manageable size, as well as to introduce more differentiation between the enemies and bosses. That included making sure each of the player's abilities was effective against a particular enemy type to encourage more varied gameplay. "I think the area that we wanted to push more but never quite got was the bosses," he continues. "I still think the boss mechanics in the end were a little weak and a little repetitive." That said, he thinks the bosses in the final game are a marked improvement on the original versions, which he reckons were "just a sack of hit points". He also remembers cutting out ▶

» Sam Barlow was the game director and writer of *Legacy Of Kain: Dead Sun* at Climax Studios. After the game was cancelled, he left Climax to go independent, creating the acclaimed FMV games *Her Story*, *Telling Lies* and *Immortality*.

» Scott Krotz worked as a programmer on *Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver*, *Soul Reaver 2* and *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance*. He remains at Crystal Dynamics, and most recently was the technical director for *Marvel's Avengers*.

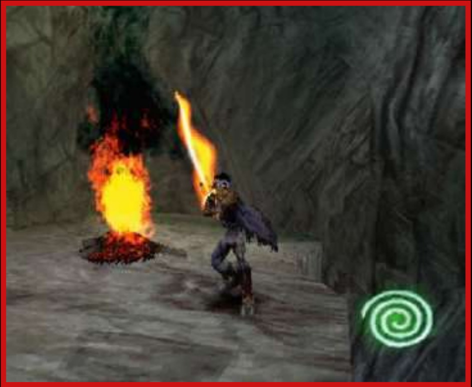
CONVOLUTED TIMELINES

BACK TO THE FUTURE, AND BACK AGAIN

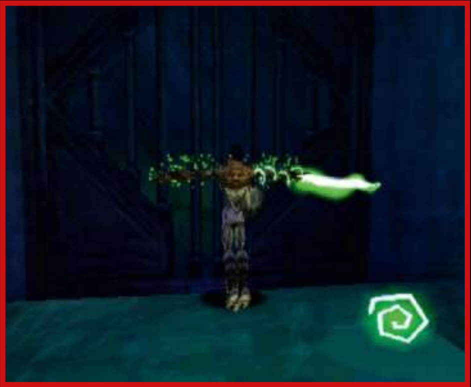
■ The time-travelling storyline of the *Legacy Of Kain* series can be difficult to follow, even for the most dedicated fans. It all starts when Moebius The Time Streamer sends Kain back in time to kill William The Just, who would later go on to become the Nemesis, leading massacres with his fanatical army. By killing the young William, Kain kick-starts a new timeline.

Then Raziel is sent back in time at the end of *Soul Reaver*, and the subsequent game sees him travel backwards and forwards through Nosgoth's past and future. He is destined to kill Kain, but resists the forces of destiny and spares him, kicking off another timeline. Later in *Soul Reaver 2*, Raziel kills his former human self, and his soul begins to be absorbed by the Soul Reaver – until Kain intervenes to pull out the blade, thus triggering yet another timeline.

Trying to follow all the events and their repercussions is enough to make your brain melt, but it essentially boils down to this: all events in Nosgoth are predestined, but Raziel is an exception to the rule, and has the ability to change history. Plus Raziel is inextricably linked with the Soul Reaver, so if two versions of the sword ever meet, timey-wimey things happen.



» [PlayStation] Thrusting the Soul Reaver into a bonfire imbues it with the power of fire



» [PlayStation] When in the spectral realm, Raziel can phase through bars that are impassable in the material realm.

▶several minor characters that "just weren't pulling their weight narratively".

Jason is at pains to point out that the vision of the game and its complex lore was all down to Silicon Knights – although relations between the two companies became increasingly fraught. "Denis Dyack has always been a very strong personality, incredibly strong," says Jason. "It helps him a lot, because without certain fights, *Kain* would have been different, and he knew what to fight for. The problem was that at a certain point, he started to fight everything. And then it got really contentious, because we needed to ship. Crystal was not nearly as large as it is now, and not nearly as established back then, and we really needed to ship this and make it work."

Denis wanted things to be perfect. And unfortunately perfect was not so much on the agenda, it was getting things the best we could, and he definitely got upset at that. And then toward the very end, it felt like things just entirely disintegrated."

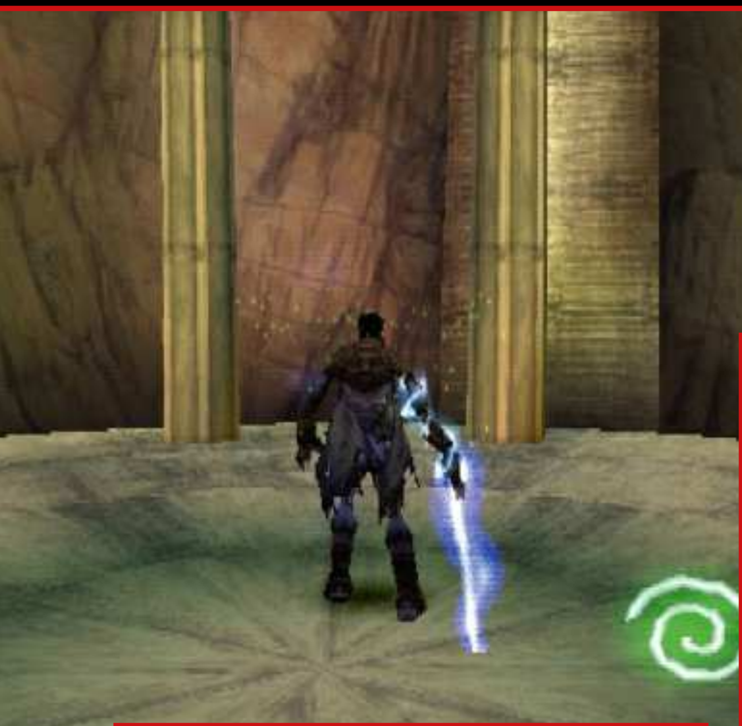
Blood Omen: Legacy Of Kain launched on the PlayStation in November 1996, after around three years of development, and was ported to the PC the following year. The reviews were mostly positive, praising in particular its *Zelda*-like gameplay and intense story. Some of the biggest criticisms were about the loading times, which Jason says the team managed to reduce significantly during development, but they still remained fairly lengthy in the final game. "I think by the end, we came up with a good game that was solid," concludes Jason. "And I remember it sold a lot better than our anticipated sales."

What happened next was messy. With the relationship between Silicon Knights and Crystal Dynamics in tatters, the Californian company decided to make a sequel without the involvement of Denis Dyack's team. Silicon Knights then filed a lawsuit claiming that Crystal Dynamics was plagiarising its concept for a *Blood Omen* sequel. The lawsuit was settled privately, but it marked the end of Silicon Knight's involvement with *Legacy of Kain*. The studio went on to develop games such as the critically acclaimed *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem* in 2002 and the critically bashed *Too Human* in 2008, but declared bankruptcy in 2014 after losing two court cases with Epic Games over use of its Unreal Engine. In the same year, Ken McCulloch, a lead writer, designer and artist on *Blood Omen* and a key member of staff at Silicon Knights, was sentenced on child pornography charges.

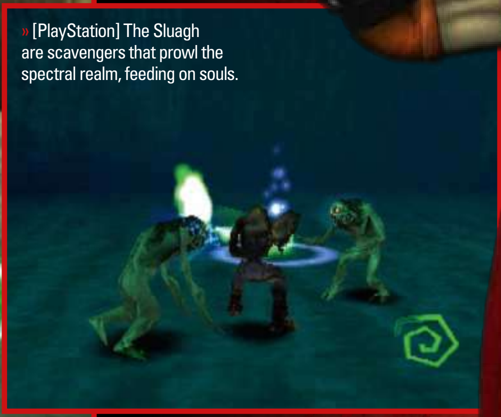
Amy Hennig had contributed to *Blood Omen*, but she stepped up to the director role for the sequel, *Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver*. The game was based on a new IP that Crystal Dynamics had been developing called *Shifter*, which was loosely inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The story centred around a fallen angel who was being hunted by his angelic former colleagues, and who had the ability to shift between the material and spiritual realms, gliding on tattered wings. The dark hero of the story was on a quest to take revenge on the false god who betrayed him.

Hennig's team were asked to take this concept and adapt it to the *Legacy Of Kain* world, which caused some consternation at first. But they rose to the challenge, and many of the ideas from *Shifter* made it into *Soul Reaver*. The main character, Raziel (the name of an angel in the teachings of Jewish mysticism), retains the tattered wings, and can shift between planes – which was something of a technical challenge. "I had to work on some of the collision tech that would allow the transition into the spectral realm without you falling through the world, which was a pretty common problem when we first started," says Scott Krotz, a programmer on the game.

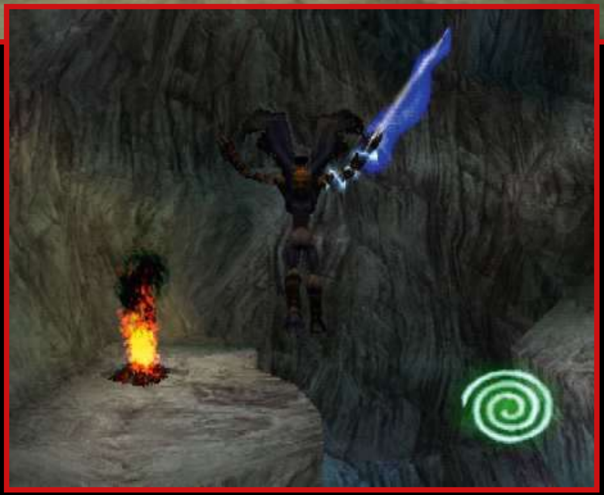
The whole concept behind *Soul Reaver* was incredibly ambitious. Whereas *Blood Omen* was 2D, *Soul Reaver* made the ▶



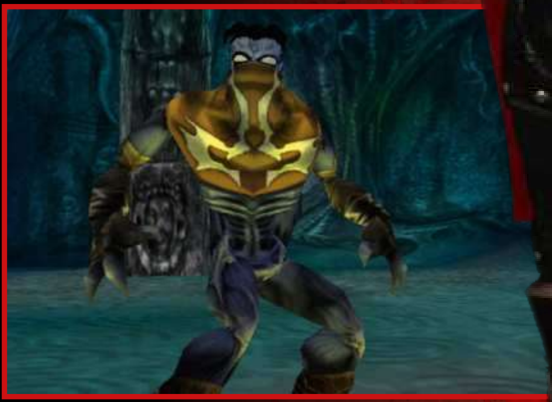
» [PlayStation] After Raziel discovers the Soul Reaver, it shatters to release what's known as the Wraith Blade, which bonds inextricably to his arm.



» [PlayStation] The Sluagh are scavengers that prowl the spectral realm, feeding on souls.



» [PlayStation] Raziel's tattered wings allow him to glide for short distances.



» [Dreamcast] The Dutch firm Nixxes handled the Dreamcast port of *Soul Reaver*, which is graphically far superior to the original.

KEY CHARACTERS THE FOLKS WHO PUT THE 'ANTI' INTO ANTI-HERO

KAIN

■ In *Blood Omen*, the vampire Kain is given the task of purging the corruption afflicting the Pillars Of Nosgoth by hunting down their Guardians. But his refusal to sacrifice himself at the end unleashes corruption across the world, and he returns as an antagonist in *Soul Reaver*.

RAZIEL

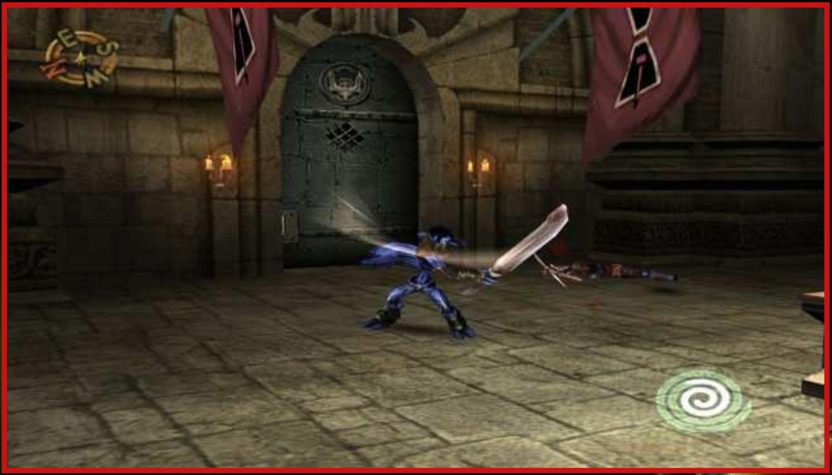
■ The vampire Raziel is murdered by Kain at the start of *Soul Reaver*, but is resurrected as a wraith by The Elder God, giving him the ability to pass into the spectral realm. He acquires a soul-devouring sword, the Soul Reaver, and sets out to take his revenge on Kain.

MOEBIUS THE TIME STREAMER

■ Moebius was one of the Guardians Of The Pillars Of Nosgoth. He repeatedly sets out to thwart the plans of Kain and Raziel across the series, in an attempt to modify the timelines and wipe out the vampire race.

THE ELDER GOD

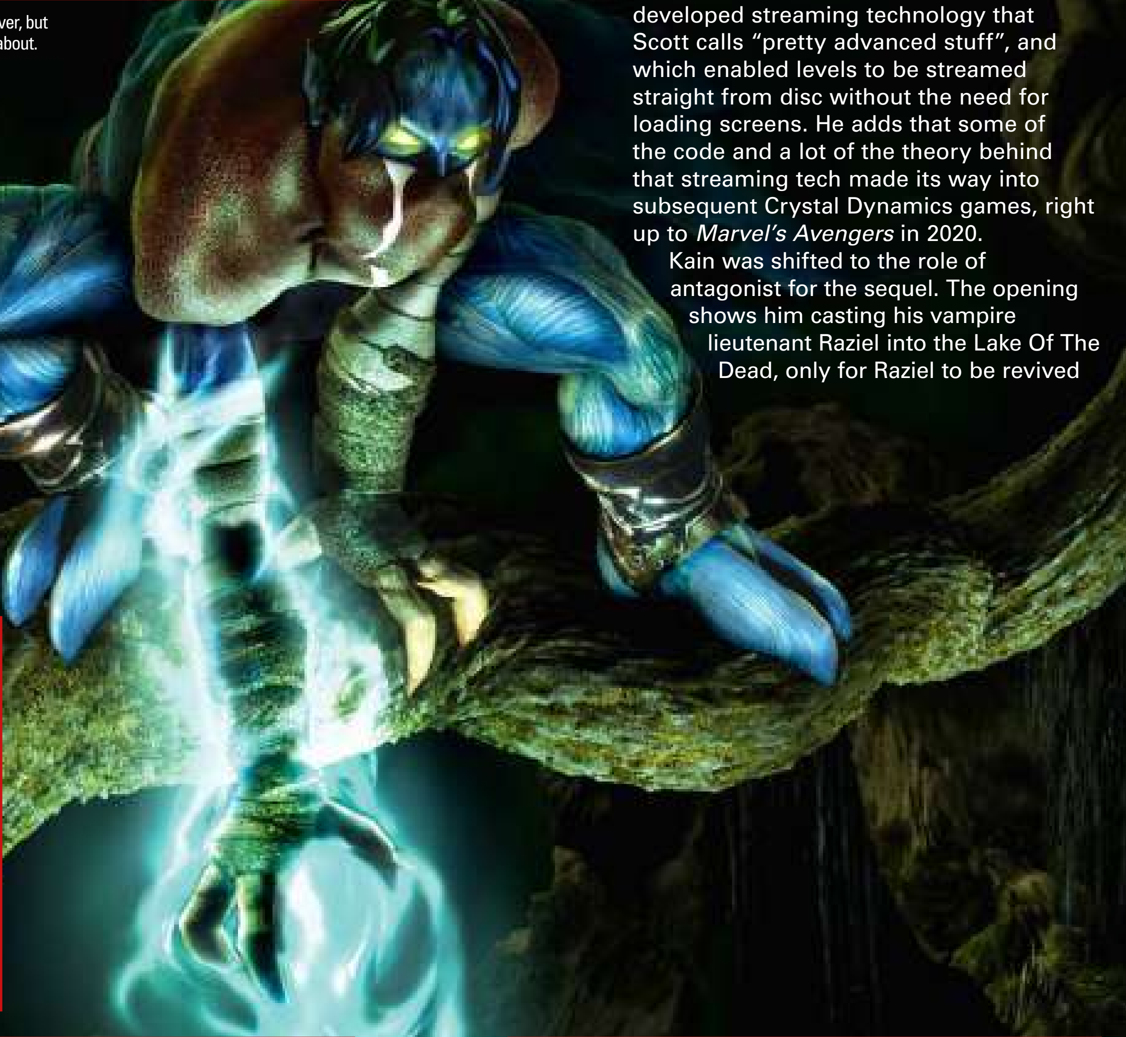
■ The tentacular Elder God has more than a little of the old HP Lovecraft about it. This ancient being revives Raziel as a wraith after Kain casts him into the Lake Of The Dead at the beginning of *Soul Reaver*, and it becomes a central antagonist as the series progresses.



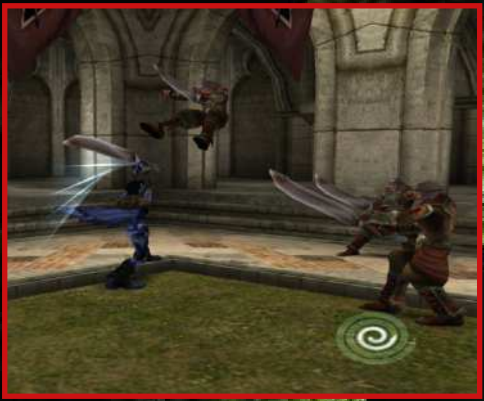
» [PC] Raziel starts *Soul Reaver 2* without the Soul Reaver, but luckily there are some regular boring old swords lying about.

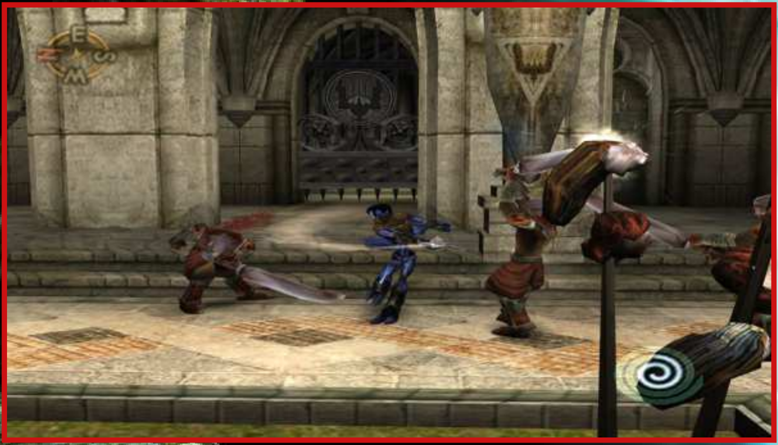
▶ jump to full 3D, and pushed the ageing PlayStation to its limits. “We used pretty much every byte on the PS1,” says Scott. “We were always trying to figure out how to make things more memory efficient, and how to be able to get more efficiency out of the PlayStation 1 so that we could render the size of the environments that we wanted.” Lead programmer Carl Stika developed streaming technology that Scott calls “pretty advanced stuff”, and which enabled levels to be streamed straight from disc without the need for loading screens. He adds that some of the code and a lot of the theory behind that streaming tech made its way into subsequent Crystal Dynamics games, right up to *Marvel’s Avengers* in 2020.

Kain was shifted to the role of antagonist for the sequel. The opening shows him casting his vampire lieutenant Raziel into the Lake Of The Dead, only for Raziel to be revived

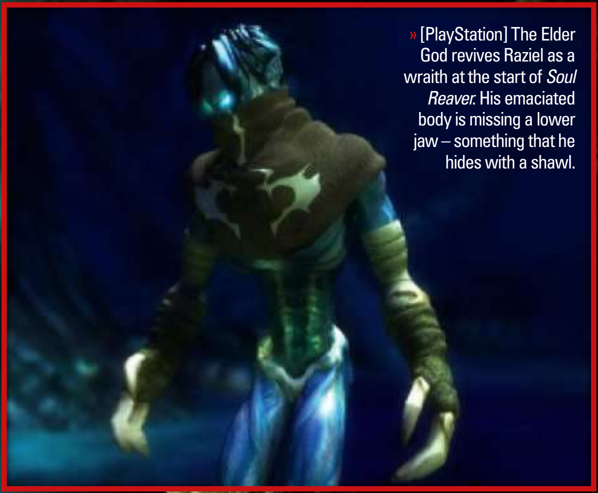


» [PC] Triggering a heavy attack can launch enemies into the air.





» [PC] The beginning of *Soul Reaver 2* sees Raziel being sent back in time to before the events of *Blood Omen*.



» [PlayStation] The Elder God revives Raziel as a wraith at the start of *Soul Reaver*. His emaciated body is missing a lower jaw – something that he hides with a shawl.

» [PC] *Blood Omen 2* tells the story of how Kain reclaims the Soul Reaver, and is set between *Blood Omen* and *Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver.*

as a wraith by The Elder God, an ancient entity who entreats Raziel to kill Kain. Raziel later acquires the Soul Reaver, a powerful soul-absorbing sword, and goes on to defeat a series of monstrous vampires, claiming their souls and gaining new abilities in the process.

***Soul Reaver* was released for the PlayStation and PC in 1999, and ported to the Sega Dreamcast the following year by Dutch company Nixxes Software.** It was rapturously received by fans and reviewers alike, and the PlayStation version holds a 91% score on Metacritic, the highest mark of any game in the *Legacy Of Kain* series. *Edge* magazine called the shifting between realms a "complex and inspired piece of design".

Following the success of *Soul Reaver*, Crystal Dynamics began work on two sequels simultaneously. *Soul Reaver 2* would be directed by Amy Hennig, while a separate team led by Glen Schofield (who later went on to create *Dead Space*) would make *Blood Omen 2*. The former game continued the story of Raziel, while the latter cast the player once again as Kain.

Scott says there were a lot of debates at Crystal about whether to develop the games for the original PlayStation, or whether to target the soon-to-be-launched PlayStation 2. The latter eventually won out – much to the delight of certain team members, says Scott. "One of the 3D artists [was] so excited [they were] just running around the office yelling, 'More polygons! More polygons!'" he laughs. One of the big differences with the new console was being able to pull information from the disc much more quickly. "On *Soul Reaver 1*, if you ever encountered a door Raziel had to walk through somewhat slowly, that was often put in to help with the streaming, because it would ensure that there was enough time for the data to load," says Scott. "But I think once we got into *Soul Reaver 2*, there was less of that."

Soul Reaver 2 picks up where *Soul Reaver* left off, in a cliffhanger ending which saw Raziel being cast back in time to 30 years before the events of *Blood Omen*. That cliffhanger was partly a result of the development team running out of time, says Scott. "[We] had a grander vision than we could kind of complete, I think, and we tried to fully flesh out the story in the subsequent games." The plot sees Raziel exploring both the past and future of Nosgoth, bumping into all sorts of time loops and paradoxes along the way (see Convoluted Timelines).

Blood Omen 2, meanwhile, explores the events between *Blood Omen* and *Soul Reaver*, with Kain setting out to defeat a clan of vampire hunters and claim the stolen Soul Reaver sword.

Both games were developed in a remarkably short time. *Soul Reaver 2* was released in October 2001, only two years after the previous game, and *Blood Omen 2* launched just a few months later in March 2002. Both games came out on the PC and PlayStation 2, but *Blood Omen 2* was also released on the Xbox and GameCube. *Soul* ►

THE LOST SUN

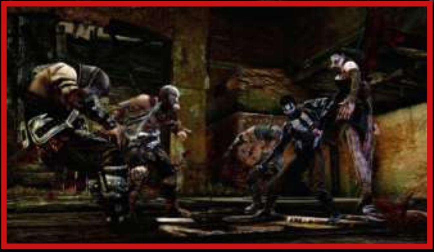
WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED NEXT...

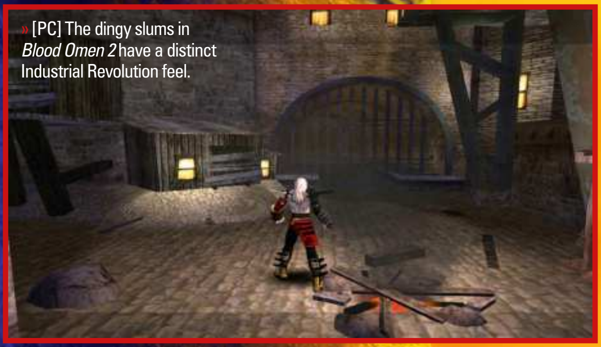
■ Sam Barlow was the director and writer for *Legacy Of Kain: Dead Sun*, which ended up being cancelled by Square Enix after around three years in development. His idea was to ignore the convoluted time-travel plot lines of previous entries, and instead pick up on an abandoned ending for *Soul Reaver.* The finale for that game ends with a cliffhanger in which Raziel travels back through time – but in the original storyline, Raziel would have returned and activated the Silenced Cathedral. This was a giant weapon built by humans that would unleash a 'deadly hymn' to purge all vampires across the world.

"I love that ending of actually wiping out the vampires," says Sam. "So we were kind of doing our version of that story." *Dead Sun* would be set many years after this event – but where a devout order of vampires has managed to survive by training their bodies to shift into the spectral realm, something only Raziel had hitherto been able to achieve. "Then one of them leaves the order and becomes an assassin [called Gein]," continues Sam. "So he's your badass main character that you put on a box with all the shades of grey and everything, but the sleight of hand was [that] the actual main character would be this very cynical atheist priest human [called Asher]. The launching point for the story is he gets killed by this badass spectral assassin, who then consumes his soul – but somehow when this happens, his soul takes over the body of the assassin.

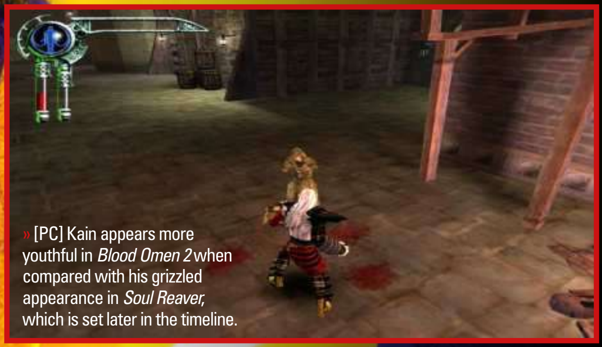
"A lot of the narrative was delivered by having the soul of the assassin still present, and he walks around like a kind of imaginary friend – I think at the time we pitched it as [being like] Number Six in *Battlestar Galactica*.

"A key part of the storyline was going to be this … woman who was a human concubine to essentially the vampire JFK. He dies in the vampire wars, and she's pregnant with his baby, which is unheard of because humans and vampires cannot normally reproduce together." In an act of defiance, she kills herself, but her body does not decay, and she's kept in a temple and revered as a saint. Asher discovers he has the ability to reanimate people by pulling souls from the spectral realm back into the living world, and he brings her back to life. But as soon as he does, she goes into labour and gives birth to a child who has been alive inside her for 300 years thanks to his vampiric blood. Sam concludes that, "[The child] has developed super-advanced telepathic powers, and has actually been controlling all of the people in this strange monastic order. And he becomes ... the main antagonist."

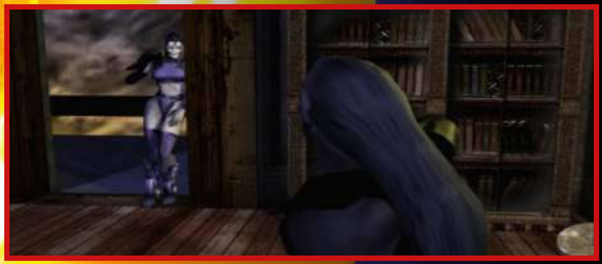




» [PC] The dingy slums in *Blood Omen 2* have a distinct Industrial Revolution feel.

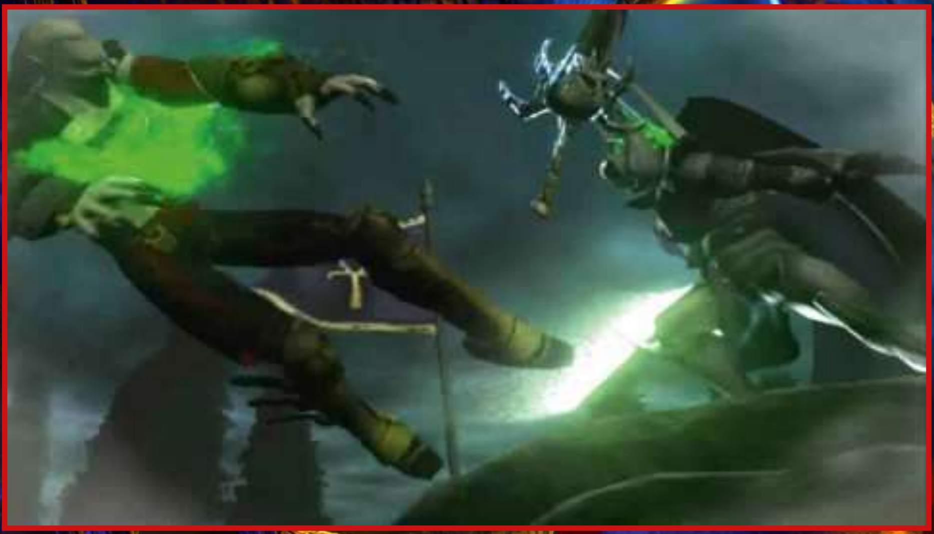


» [PC] Kain appears more youthful in *Blood Omen 2* when compared with his grizzled appearance in *Soul Reaver*, which is set later in the timeline.



» [PC] The vampire Umah guides Kain during *Blood Omen 2* after he loses his memories.

» [PC] A cinematic at the start of *Blood Omen 2* depicts Kain being defeated by the Sarafan Lord, the leader of an army of vampire hunters. The game begins with Kain waking up 200 years later.

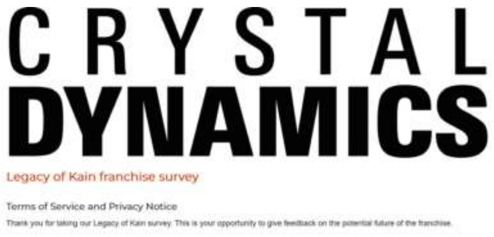


KAIN RESURRECTED

COULD THE FAMOUS ANTI-HERO RETURN?

■ Back in May 2022, the Swedish firm Embracer announced it was purchasing Crystal Dynamics and two other Western studios owned by Square Enix, in the process securing the rights to franchises including *Tomb Raider*, *Deus Ex* and *Legacy Of Kain*. Commenting on the deal as part of the company's fourth-quarter earnings report, Embracer CEO Lars Wingefors said, "We see great potential, not only in sequels but also in remakes, remasters, spinoffs as well as transmedia projects across the group."

The deal was finalised in August, and in late-September, Crystal Dynamics released an online survey that posed a number of questions about the *Legacy Of Kain* games, such as asking respondents whether they have heard of the series and what they enjoy about vampire games. Most interestingly, the survey asks respondents whether they would be interested in potential remasters, reboots and sequels, and whether they would want them to be single-player or multiplayer. We asked Crystal Dynamics whether this means the series will be returning, and their response was, "We don't have anything to announce regarding future plans for *Legacy Of Kain*." Still, at least we know the developer is thinking about the potential of resurrecting the franchise: perhaps we could see Kain et al return from the (un)dead at some point in the future.



CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

Legacy of Kain franchise survey

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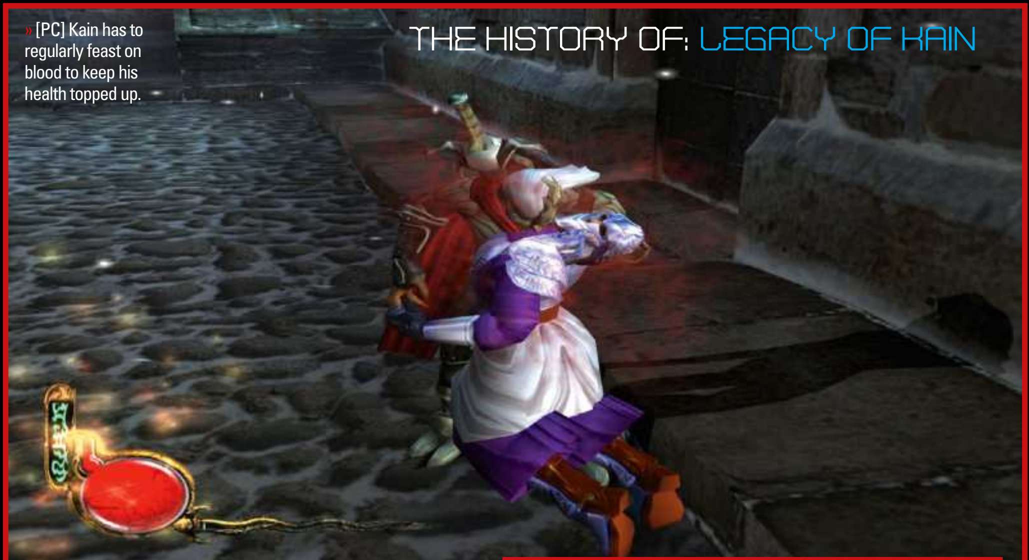
Thank you for taking our Legacy of Kain survey. This is your opportunity to give feedback on the potential future of the franchise.



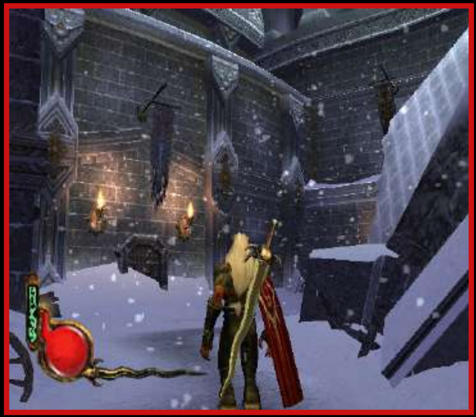
» [PC] Kain has to regularly feast on blood to keep his health topped up.

Reaver 2 was deemed to have a good if sometimes confusing plot, although otherwise it was highly similar to its predecessor, and earned a lower Metacritic score of 80% on PS2. Meanwhile, IGN praised *Blood Omen 2* for its story, but criticised its slow pacing, awarding it 7.7 out of 10.

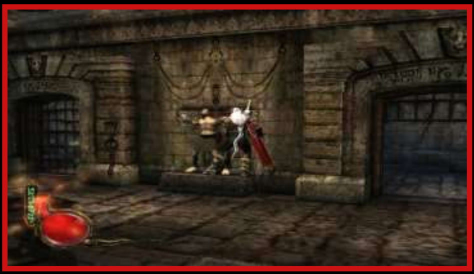
Crystal Dynamics then began work on what would turn out to be the last game in the series, *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance*, which finally brought together the stories of Raziel and Kain, both of whom were playable. "It was Amy who was the main creative vision … and that was her idea of the franchise coming together," says Scott. "There was a lot of tech to work on to have the dual characters. And we were looking for different ways to experiment: the game *Ico* was a touch point in terms of doing some of the cameras." Scott also developed a new lighting system for the game.

Defiance features a complex plot that resolves many of the unanswered questions from previous games. The differences between playing as Raziel and Kain also added some variety, with the former's levels mostly based around puzzle solving, and the latter's around combat. It was released for the PS2, Xbox and PC in late-2003, and received mostly positive reviews, with a Metacritic average of 75% on PS2.

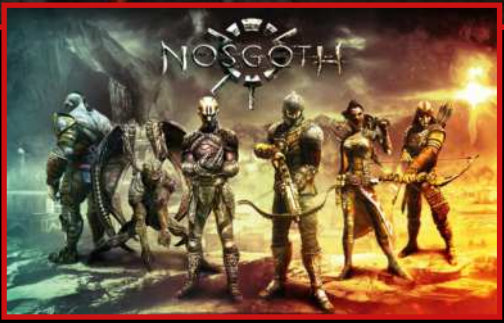
Crystal Dynamics had been bought by Eidos Interactive in 1998, and following the disastrous critical reception of Core Design's *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* in 2003, the publisher decided to hand the franchise over to Crystal. "We took the team that was working on the *Legacy Of Kain* stuff and just transitioned them to work on *Tomb Raider*," says Scott. "So the *Soul Reaver* team was the one that did *Tomb Raider: Legend*, basically." By this point, however, Amy Hennig had departed for Naughty Dog, where she became head writer and creative director for the *Uncharted* series.



» [PC] Only a handful of screenshots survive from the cancelled game *Legacy Of Kain: The Dark Prophecy*, which was being made by Ritual Entertainment.



» [PC] The first section of *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* casts you as Kain, but later you can also play as Raziel.



» Artwork for *Nosgoth*, a multiplayer game developed by Psyonix that pitted vampires and humans against each other. A closed beta was launched in 2015, but the game was never officially released.

Eidos handed over the reins of *Legacy Of Kain* to Ritual Entertainment in Dallas, Texas, the studio behind *SiN*. It began work on a sixth game, *Legacy Of Kain: The Dark Prophecy*, but it was abandoned just a few months into development. Studio founder Robert Atkins says the cancellation was down to lower-than-expected sales figures for *Defiance*, as well as the fact that the PS2 was nearing the end of its life cycle. If you consider that *Tomb Raider: Legend* sold around 4.5 million units, whereas the combined sales figures for all five *Legacy Of Kain* games are somewhere in the region of 3.5 million, you can start to see why Eidos put the series on ice.

But in 2009, Eidos was acquired by Square Enix, and the Japanese company decided to revive *Legacy Of Kain*. The firm approached various developers, eventually settling on Climax Studios in the UK, which had just released the critically acclaimed *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* for the Nintendo Wii. Sam Barlow, the designer of *Shattered Memories*, was appointed as director and writer of the new game, which was initially titled *Legacy Of Kain: Savage Messiah*, but later renamed to *Legacy Of Kain: Dead Sun*. Sam's idea was to set the game in the far future of Nosgoth with a new set of characters, thus avoiding becoming embroiled in what he calls "the world's most complicated time-travelling chronology nonsense" (see The Lost Sun).

Not long after, Square Enix appointed Psyonix in San Diego, California, to create the multiplayer component of *Dead Sun*. "We were working on *Bulletstorm* with EA, which is actually, I think, how we got *Legacy Of Kain*," says Jimi Doss, who joined Psyonix in 2010. "There was all this, 'Oh yeah, that little Psyonix group, they can do a multiplayer game' – because that's all we were, we were kind of the multiplayer component people.

"All the attention was on Climax at the time, so we were able to run hog wild with our own stuff. We were allowed to go and play in a sandbox with no adult supervision." However, Square cancelled *Dead Sun* in 2012, and what was once meant to be the game's multiplayer component ended up becoming a standalone game called *Nosgoth*. Its existence was leaked in 2013, and a closed beta was launched in early 2015 – but the reception was lukewarm. "You get these people just bemoaning the fact that it's a multiplayer game and not a campaign, not a single-player," says Jimi. "And I get it: as a fan of many games out there, when they don't make the game that I wanted them to make, I get hurt."

The game never got a full release, and the *Nosgoth* servers were shut down in 2016, thus marking the final chapter of the *Legacy Of Kain* – although there are encouraging signs (see Kain Resurrected) that the series might be stirring once more. ✱

Nekketsu Oyako

BARMY, BUT BORING

» SATURN » 1994 » TECHNOSOFT

While Technosoft is best-known for scintillating shmups like *Hyper Duel, Elemental Master* and the *Thunder Force* series, it has often dabbled in other genres as well. While it has not always had the same success, it has always presented its ideas in interesting ways and that's why I've always wanted to add *Nekketsu Oyako* to my Saturn library.

I'm pretty sure my first encounter with *Hot-Blooded Family* (as it's also known) was seeing it running on a TV at the Video Game Centre in Bournemouth. It looked fantastic fun, but for some reason I never got around to owning it. Fast forward to today and emulation and devices like the Satiator mean it's far more accessible and I thought I'd give it a whirl before shelling out the £80-plus pounds it now typically sells for.

There's a lot to like about Technosoft's game – it looks superb, with stunning well-animated characters, engaging enemy design and plenty of unusual locations that range from a theme park, complete with a roller-coaster you fight on, to the insides of a whale that emits water from its blowhole as you fight a boss on top of its head. It sounds great as well and is filled with off-the-wall humour that ranges from a boss who aggressively attacks you by whipping her hair about, to boxing glove-wearing octopi.

Nekketsu Oyako is delightfully barmy and it's easy to see why it's spoken about in such revered tones, but I simply can't get on with it. Regardless of which of the three available characters you plump for, you'll find *Nekketsu Oyako*'s sluggish pace a real buzzkill. Even teaming up with a friend doesn't improve things. It's far more fun to look at than it is to play and completing it with all three characters left me with the realisation I'd probably never go back to it. I think I'll stick with *Thunder Force III* and *Devil Crash MD* instead. *

ULTIMATE GUIDE

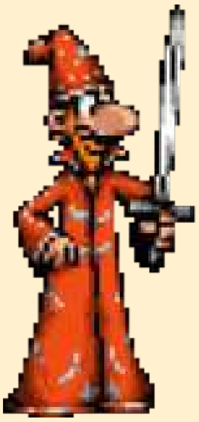
DISCWORLD

IN 1995, TERRY PRATCHETT'S DISCWORLD UNIVERSE WAS BROUGHT TO LIFE BY A DEDICATED TEAM OF DEVELOPERS AND SOME STELLAR COMIC TALENT. DUST OFF YOUR LUGGAGE AND KEEP A BANANA AT THE READY AS WE SLINK OUT OF THE SHADES TO OFFER A MUCH-NEEDED GUIDE TO THIS NOTORIOUSLY TRICKY POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE

WORDS BY TOM OLDFIELD

After a short but eventful prologue featuring Death himself, Rob Brydon's notorious Michael Caine impression and a spot of immolation, the novice wizard Rincewind is roused from his slumber, high in the towers of the Unseen University. After a satisfying scratch, he hops out of bed then casually breaks the fourth wall as he squints at a "sinister shape" perched atop a distant spire before noting it as a potential plot element.

This particular plot element turns out to be a dragon, summoned by a mysterious, secret brotherhood to terrorise the city of Ankh-Morpork and the Discworld beyond. It would be poor PR for the wizards of the Unseen University to be caught twiddling their thumbs with a marauding mythical creature on the loose, so Rincewind is roped in to track the beast down and (in the spirit of the game) give it a good talking to.



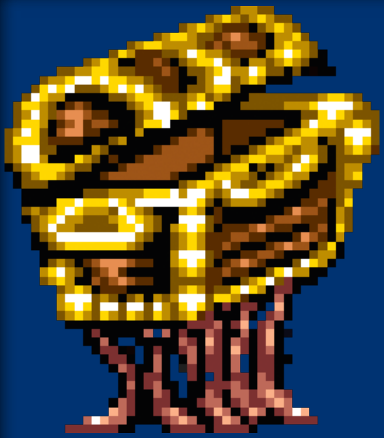
The seeds of *Discworld* first germinated in the minds of two former colleagues at Beam Software, Angela Sutherland and Gregg Barnett. Angela had branched out to form Teeny Weeny Games and Gregg, Perfect 10 Productions, two companies that shared similar philosophies. Joining forces as Sutherland-Barnett, they conspired to pitch an idea to the prolific and hugely popular *Discworld* author and creator, Terry Pratchett. This idea would not only remain true to his much-loved universe but also compete with the big point-and-click fish swimming in the pond at the time, namely the *Monkey Island* and *Sam & Max* franchises, backed by LucasArts. After six months of cajolery, Terry agreed to work with the duo, and they set about creating a labour of love.

> "RINCEWIND COULD HAVE POTENTIALLY BEEN VOICED BY JOHN CLEESE, THOUGH HE TURNED DOWN THE TEAM WITH THE FAMOUS PHRASE, 'FUCK OFF, I DON'T DO GAMES!'"

Progressing through the story takes Rincewind on a fantastic, often abstract adventure through the shady streets of Ankh-Morpork, the forests and mountains of the Discworld and eventually time and space itself. Along the way, he'll acquire a plethora of weird and wonderful items to stuff into his pockets or to keep safe within the magical maw of his faithful companion, the Luggage. Using these trinkets correctly will satisfy the wills and whims of the game's eccentric denizens, although this is often easier said than done.

Discworld is widely regarded as one of the most difficult and mind-bending point-and-click puzzle games ever made. Solving a particular puzzle often requires some serious out-of-the-box

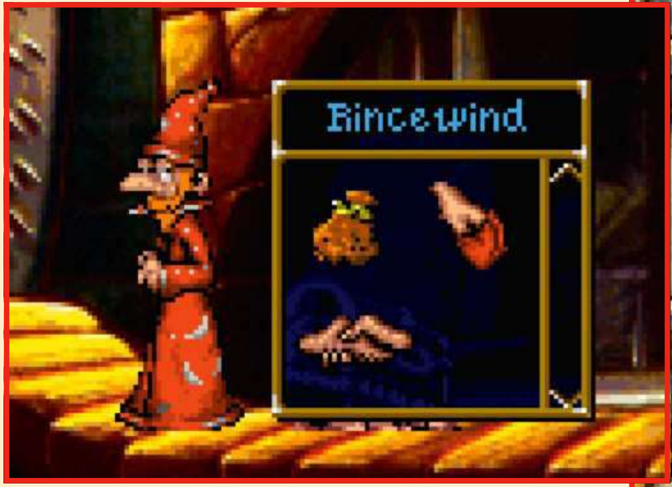
▶



MIND YOUR LUGGAGE

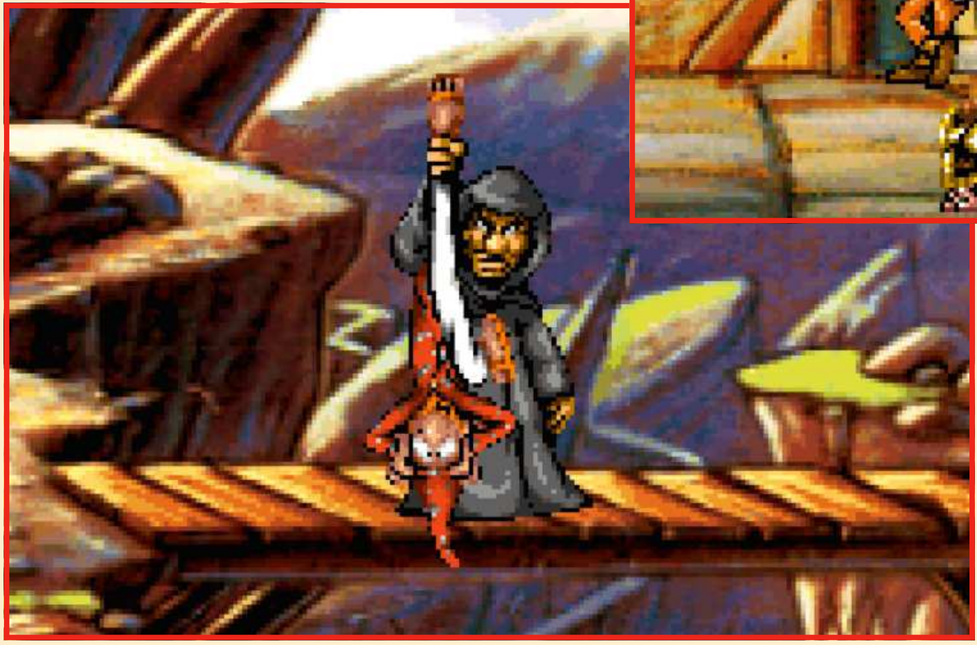
REARRANGE SOME BRAIN SPACE TO PACK IN OUR TOP LUGGAGE FACTS

- The Luggage is crafted from Sapient Pearwood, (a rare material sourced from trees exposed to high levels of magic).
- The Luggage is most often described as part suitcase, part loyal companion and part homicidal maniac.
- It is impervious to magic and to most physical attacks.
- The horrors of its maw are often hidden but when angered or excited, its teeth appear as white tombstones, slickened by a frothing red tongue.
- It is so loyal, it will follow its owner into the most dangerous of spaces, including alternate dimensions.
- Its capacity appears to be infinite and defies the laws of space and time.
- When removing clothing from the Luggage, all items come out clean, pressed and smelling faintly of lavender.



» [PC] Rincewind's own pockets aren't the deepest but along the way he'll learn to pickpocket others and take part in a ridiculous handshake or two.

MEETING HALL



» [PC] This Monk's fate is tied into eternal struggle against Rincewind as a pawn in an incomprehensible game of the gods, although neither of them knows it.

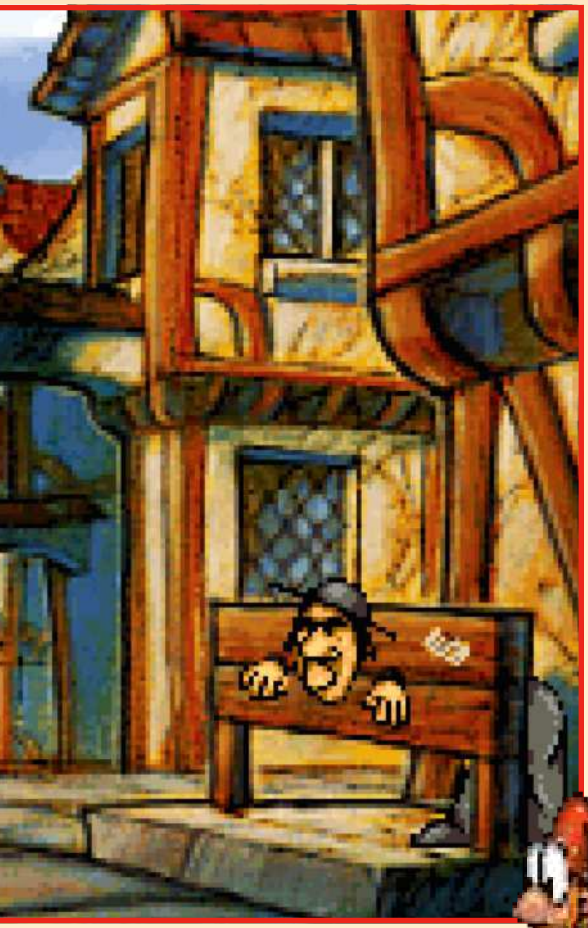
» [PC] Rincewind is an expert at attracting peril, despite his best intentions.

▶ thinking and can at times leave you feeling as though you've been utterly blindsided by a rogue donkey cart.

Many items and their intended recipients are linked together through no logical rhyme or reason which can test your lateral thinking to its limit. Would you conceive of padding a ladder with a bra stolen from an old man's trousers so you can bridge a nearby gap to gain access to the shady hovel of a sleeping thief? How about accelerating the growth of a snake with fertiliser then stiffening it with starch so you can use it as a reptilian replacement and pilfer the staff of a senior wizard?

When you do manage to connect the dots (or pixels), potentially after hours of head scratching and globe-trotting, the sudden giddy excitement you receive upon seeing a fresh animation or sparking new dialogue from an NPC is immensely gratifying. In terms of rewarding game design, *Discworld* makes you pay in sweat and tears (Rincewind can't stand the sight of blood, especially his own) but when you achieve moments of progression, they really hit home and motivate you to dive headfirst into the next challenge.

Speaking on the contentious issue of *Discworld*'s difficulty, Gregg told us that, "The truth of the matter is more nuanced. While experienced players set in their ways did indeed find it hard, I was amazed at how much easier many first-time players (Terry had lots of fans



> “MANY REVIEWERS AND COMPILERS OF LISTS AND SUCHLIKE HAVE DISCWORLD AS THE HARDEST PUZZLE GAME EVER AND I WEAR THAT WITH PRIDE”
>
> **GREGG BARNETT**

for whom this game was literally their first taste of videogames) found it. The reason was simple, they took it one puzzle at a time, one step at a time, which was actually how it was designed to be played. The issue (a design flaw really) was that most players would run around grabbing everything in sight and end up in a situation where they had a Luggage full of objects which totally muddied the waters.”

Another important element to master within *Discworld* is the speech system. As is befitting the novels, the game is crammed full of colourful characters to talk to as you see fit. You’ll usually have the option to greet them, to be sarcastic or humorous, to ask them a question or to express anger. Hints as to what motivates a particular character are often hidden within conversation so choosing the right approach for the right person will unlock the story progression you’ll be craving. Patience and a keen ear are key.

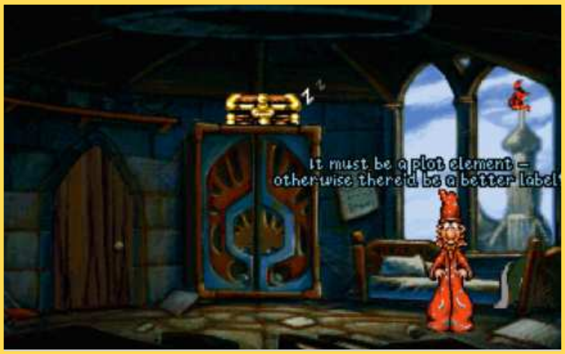
These conversations are generally an enjoyable experience, due in no small part to the accomplished voice acting of the host of British comedians and actors enlisted in *Discworld*’s creation. During your journey, it’s easy to become enamoured with the *Monty Python*-era stylings of Eric Idle who captures ▶

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH VERSION EARNS ITS PLACE IN THE LUGGAGE?

PC

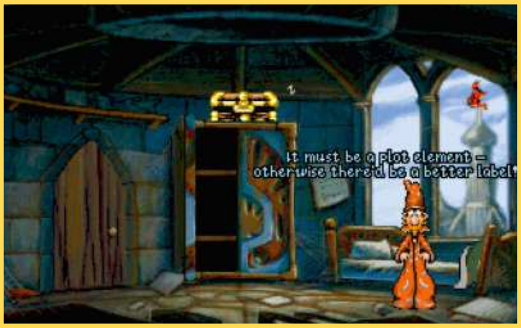
- Initially released on floppy disk and CD-ROM, only the CD-ROM version included the voice acting which would not fit onto the 15 disks of the floppy release. A CD-ROM version was later produced which essentially fixed all the game’s bugs. All PC offerings also came packaged with a snazzily produced instruction manual.



It must be a plot element – otherwise there'd be a better label!

MAC

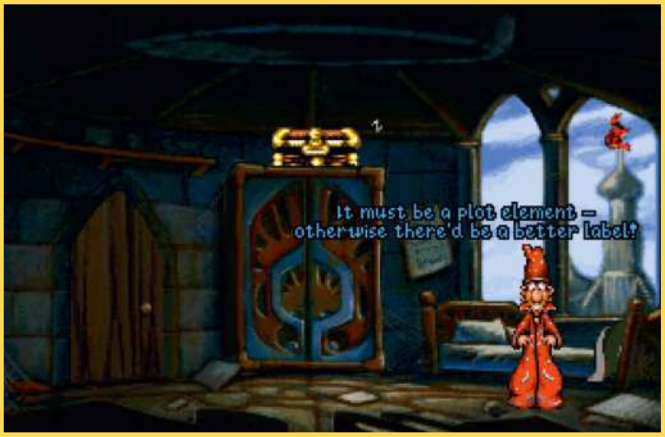
- The Mac version was released bug-free though initially encountered issues running reliably on certain models of Power Mac. Graphically similar to the other releases, this version arguably has the most lacklustre audio, neither living up to the MIDI charms of the PC or the synthy strings heard on consoles.



It must be a plot element – otherwise there'd be a better label!

PLAYSTATION

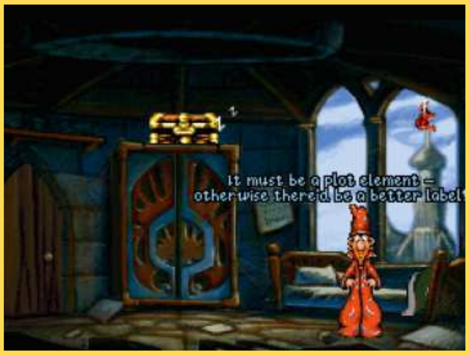
- Whilst console versions of the game looked good, their main issue stemmed from having to use a controller to navigate areas and menus originally designed for a mouse. The PlayStation port resolved this via use of the PS Mouse, enabling it to maintain some of the game’s authenticity. You’ll also notice longer loading times with a unique loading screen to compensate (featuring one of Death’s hourglasses).



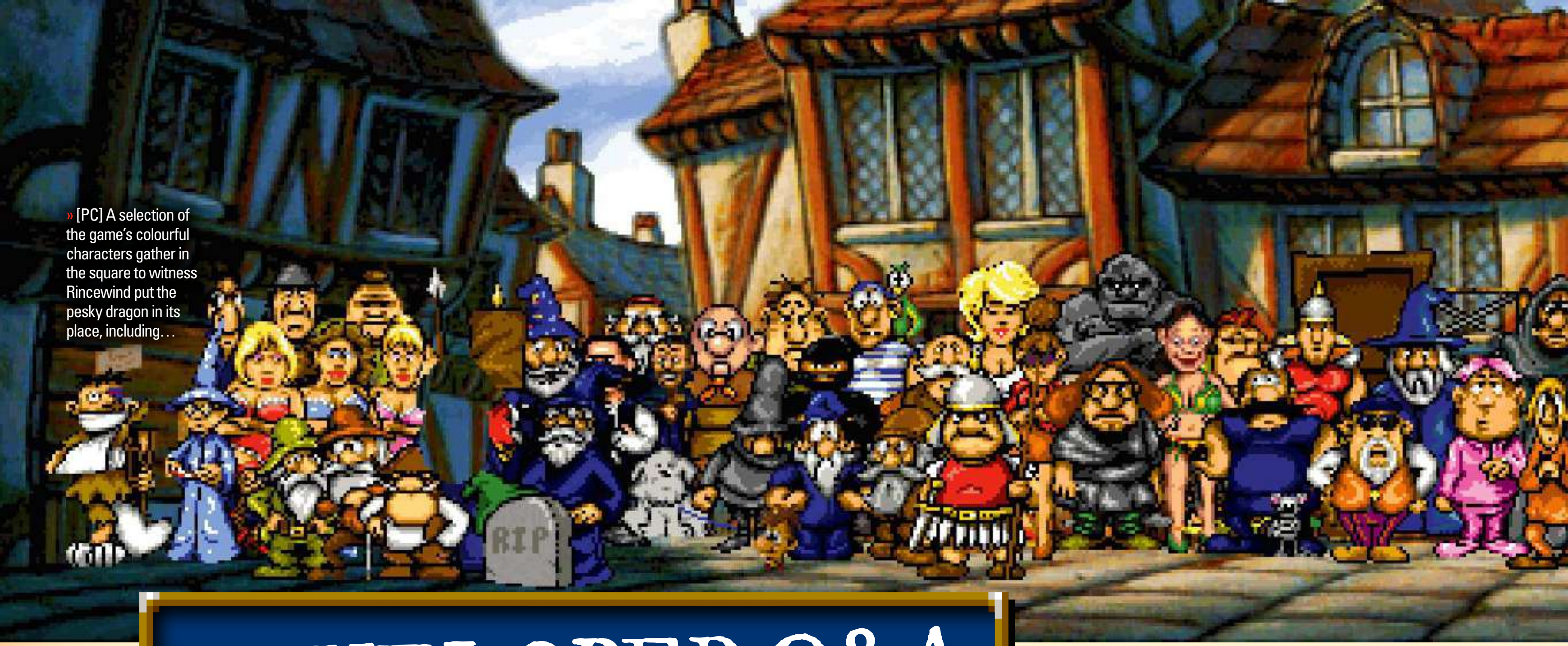
It must be a plot element – otherwise there'd be a better label!

SATURN

- Released in 1996, a year after the original, the Saturn offering boasts the best audio of the console ports, featuring brightly plucked strings and bold sound effects. A Japanese release of both the Saturn and PlayStation versions sold well in Japan as the voice acting was replaced by a popular Japanese comedian.



It must be a plot element – otherwise there'd be a better label!



» [PC] A selection of the game's colourful characters gather in the square to witness Rincewind put the pesky dragon in its place, including…

DEVELOPER Q&A

DIRECTOR GREGG BARNETT TALKS US THROUGH DISCWORLD'S CREATIVE PROCESS

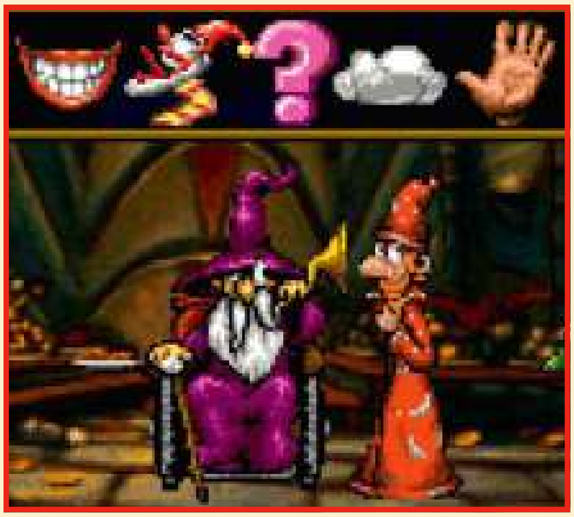
Discworld is renowned for its sharp wit and humour; how closely did you work with Terry Pratchett on the story?
The deal with Terry was for the rights to set games in the *Discworld* universe. His people would have preferred to license out individual books, but that wasn't what I was after. I wanted to do original games set on the Discworld. In fact, I designed the first game with the deal unsigned and showed it to Terry as proof of intent. He found that much more reassuring than the big cheques other parties offered him.

How did _Discworld_'s dialogue come about?
Terry really came to the party with the dialogue. I would break down the conversations and Paul Kidd would write them out fully in what approximated Terry's style. Terry would then go through every line of dialogue and change or polish as he saw fit. His main concern was for his fans – he treasured them and didn't want to include anything that might go against how they perceived the Discworld.

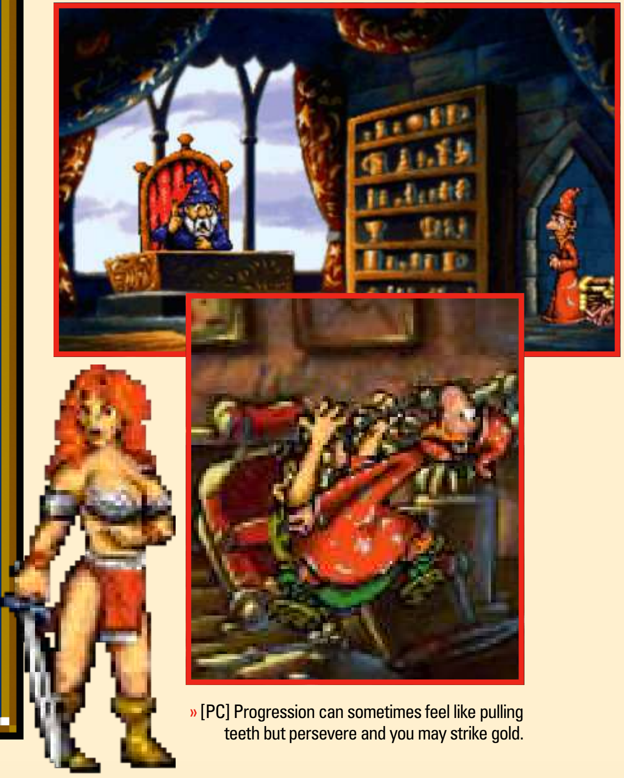
The game features stellar voice acting from big names including Eric Idle, Rob Brydon, Tony Robinson and Kate Robbins, what was it like to work with them?
It was amazing working with every one of them. At times it was like being a kid in a candy store, having unfettered access to such a trove of creativity and craziness! We'd travel to LA and do day-long sessions in the studio with Eric. Once he found his cockney accent from *Python* days (it took a while) things would motor along. Kate handled all the female voices (and quite a few male ones) and is a truly superb voice actor. Her singing in multiple accents was a real treat. It was her who recommended a then unknown Rob Brydon, who worked on every *Discworld* game, including almost 20,000 lines by himself in *Discworld Noir.*

The music also helps to create a memorable atmosphere, how much input did you have into the composition of the soundtrack?
Rob Lord led our audio team that also included Mark Bandola and Paul Weir, all exceptional musicians and audio engineers in their own rights. They treated the game almost as an interactive film score and spent a lot of time realising an audio vision for each location that sat with the art vision. It was my responsibility to specify and guide that vision, but at the same time give both the artists and musicians all the creative freedom they needed.

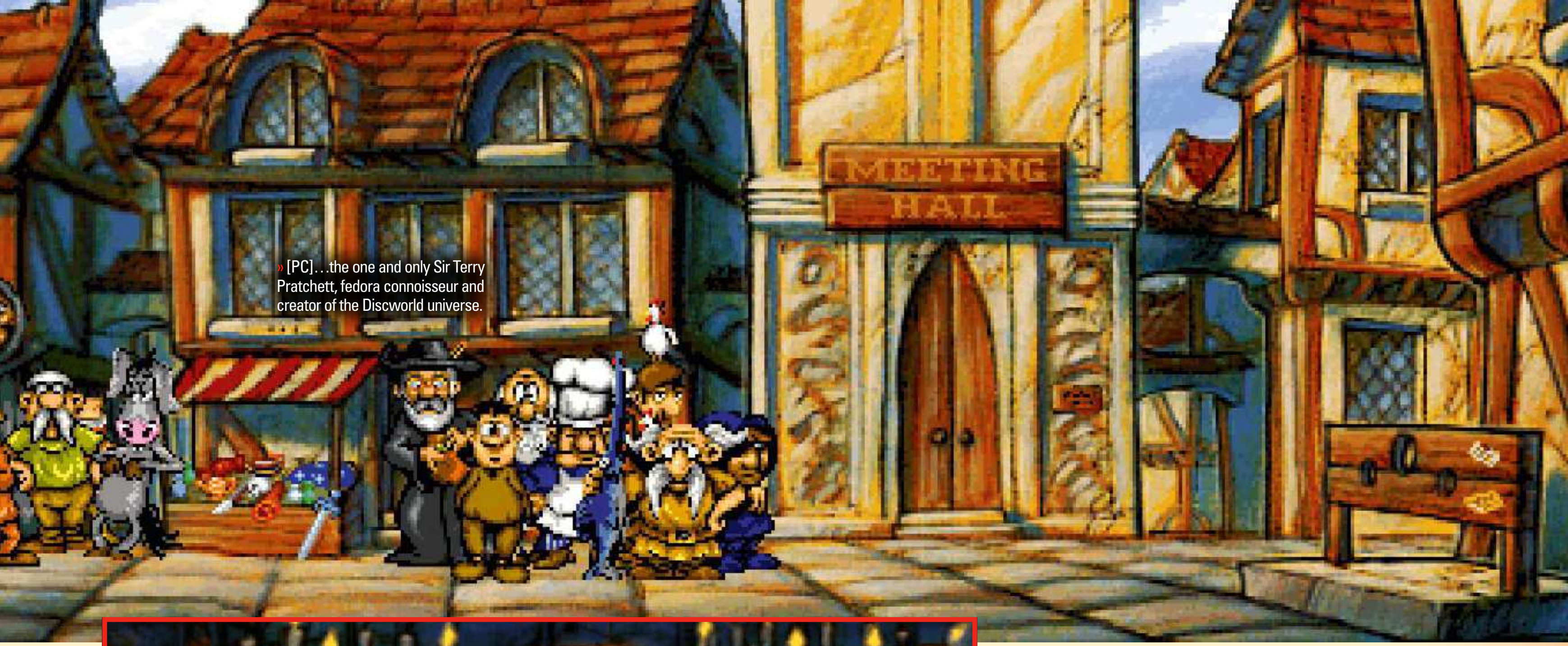
Was it a conscious decision to make the puzzles so abstract?
Oh, definitely; abstract, wacky, even slapstick at times. How hard the game was is always an interesting discussion. Many reviewers and compilers of lists and suchlike have *Discworld* as the hardest puzzle game ever and I certainly wear that with pride.



» [PC] There are multiple ways to interact with NPCs and you'll often have to deduce what motivates them before they offer any kind of aid.



» [PC] Progression can sometimes feel like pulling teeth but persevere and you may strike gold.



» [PC]…the one and only Sir Terry Pratchett, fedora connoisseur and creator of the Discworld universe.

Rincewind's wry cynicism, quick wit and unabashed cowardliness to a T. Gregg noted that Rincewind could have potentially been voiced by John Cleese, though he turned down the team with the famous phrase, "Fuck off, I don't do games!" The character became less angry as a result and Terry subsequently confided in Gregg at a much later date that he'd envisioned Rincewind more as the reluctant yet idealistic Rodney Trotter of *Only Fools And Horses* fame.

> "HIS [TERRY'S] MAIN CONCERN WAS FOR HIS FANS - HE TREASURED THEM AND DIDN'T WANT TO INCLUDE ANYTHING THAT MIGHT GO AGAINST HOW THEY PERCEIVED THE DISCWORLD"
>
> GREGG BARNETT

Act II introduces an element of metaphysical complexity to the game as after procuring a golden banana for the University's librarian, you'll gain access to L-Space. Short for Library Space, (where the reality of space and time do not exist and where all libraries in the world are connected) it becomes an important tool in progressing your adventure. Traversing into this alternate dimension, it is possible to travel back in time and interact with people and objects in different states and who wouldn't normally be found in certain areas. Taking full advantage of this along with some counterwise wine (a tipple that gets you bladdered, yesterday) leads to some very meta problem-solving and even a curious encounter with yourself on a park bench.

Whether it's your first foray into *Discworld* or you're a regular at The Broken Drum, (or The Drum if you're arriving via L-Space) the game maintains the ability to captivate your attention and spark imagination at any moment. This may arise from the MIDI-based soundtrack of the original PC release, beeping its way deep into your brain. Maybe the diversity of the world's many inhabitants, bursting with colour and intrigue. Perhaps even the hand-drawn, theatre-stage backdrops that set the tone for each scene and the game as a whole. If you dedicate some quality time to *Discworld* and play with patience and an inquisitive mind, you'll find rewards around every corner and an experience that might stay with you long after the final curtain (as Death would put it).

Ours and many other fans' feelings towards *Discworld* are best summed up in true fourth-wall-smashing style by Rincewind himself. Perhaps predicting the joy and nostalgia bestowed upon generations of fans by the game and Terry's work beyond, he once prophetically quipped, "Aren't you gonna miss all this stuff when they stop making these games? Aren't you just gonna miss it all?" *

SPINNING OUT

DISCWORLD'S SUCCESS CONJURED UP A SEQUEL AND A MUCH DARKER SPINOFF…

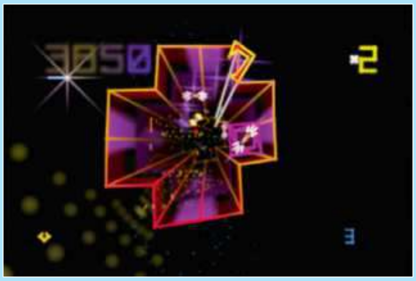
DISCWORLD II: MISSING PRESUMED…!?

■ The second instalment in the series sees Death go AWOL and Rincewind once again called upon to (very cautiously) investigate. Perfect Entertainment (Angela Sutherland and Gregg Barnett's respective companies had now officially merged) were able to field a much larger development team this time around. This enabled the sequel to boast complete cel-based animation, arranged at a Hanna-Barbera affiliated studio in the Philippines. Lessons had also been learned regarding difficulty levels, items are much more meaningful and the puzzles more intuitive, something that Rincewind expresses his relief at with every opportunity.

DISCWORLD NOIR

■ Bringing a much darker, film noir-style to proceedings, Perfect Entertainment's third offering, released in 1999, gives Rincewind a breather and instead focusses on the character of Lewton, Discworld's first and only private investigator. The most striking difference to the previous outings is the graduation to 3D character models and backdrops. Terry Pratchett was still involved in the writing and decision making for the games at the time, though in a much-reduced capacity. Main writer Chris Bateman weaved Lovecraftian influences into the game's narrative which further lent to the foreboding atmosphere and introduced elements of horror.

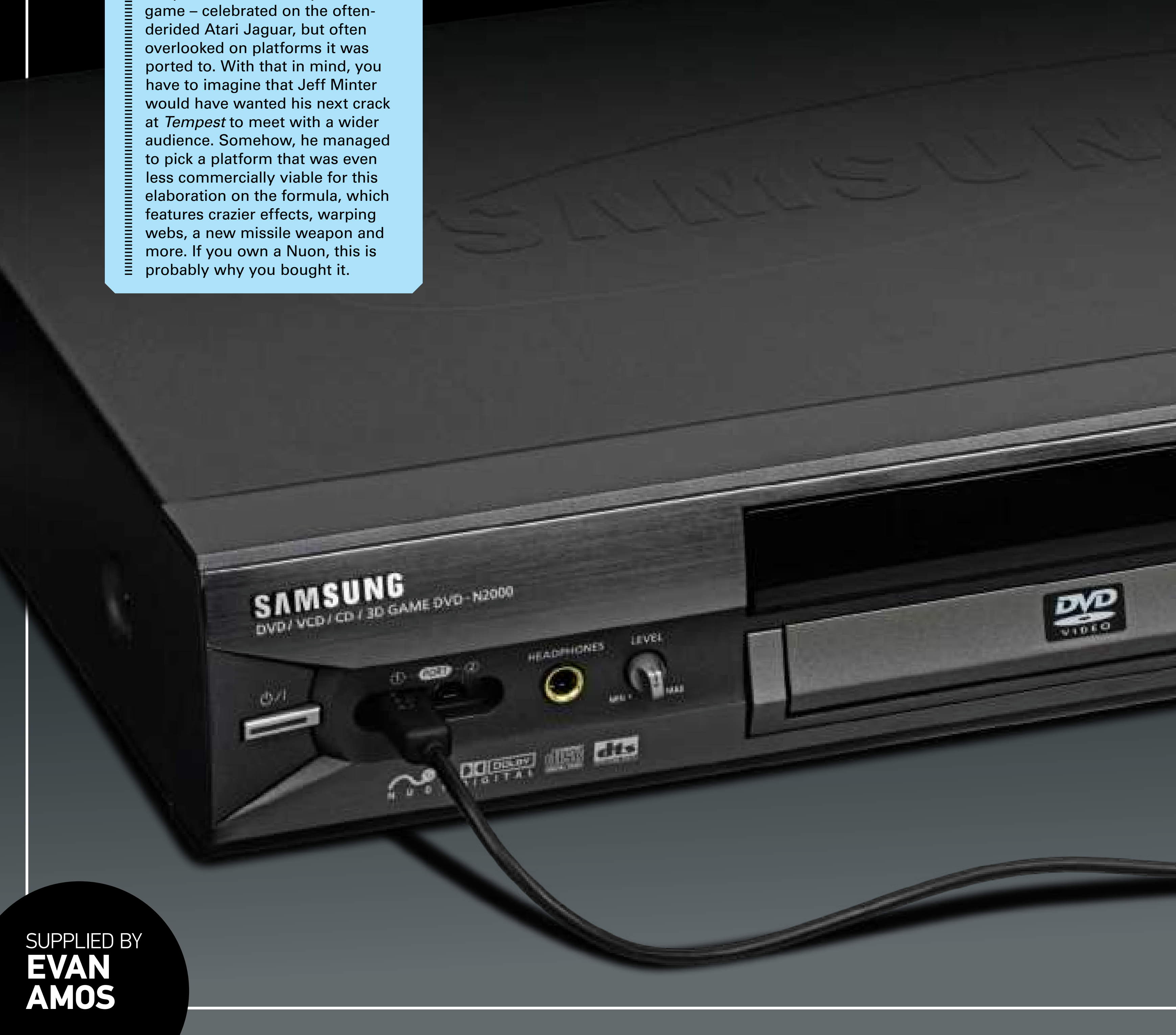
Hardware Heaven



ESSENTIAL GAME

Tempest 3000

Tempest 2000 is a funny old game – celebrated on the often-derided Atari Jaguar, but often overlooked on platforms it was ported to. With that in mind, you have to imagine that Jeff Minter would have wanted his next crack at *Tempest* to meet with a wider audience. Somehow, he managed to pick a platform that was even less commercially viable for this elaboration on the formula, which features crazier effects, warping webs, a new missile weapon and more. If you own a Nuon, this is probably why you bought it.


SAMSUNG
DVD / VCD / CD / 3D GAME DVD-N2000
HEADPHONES
LEVEL
MIN
MAX
PORT
DVD VIDEO
DOLBY DIGITAL
dts
NUON

SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

Nuon Extiva DVD-N2000

» **MANUFACTURER:** Samsung » **YEAR:** 2000
» **COST:** $399.99 (launch), £350+ (today, boxed), £115+ (today, unboxed)

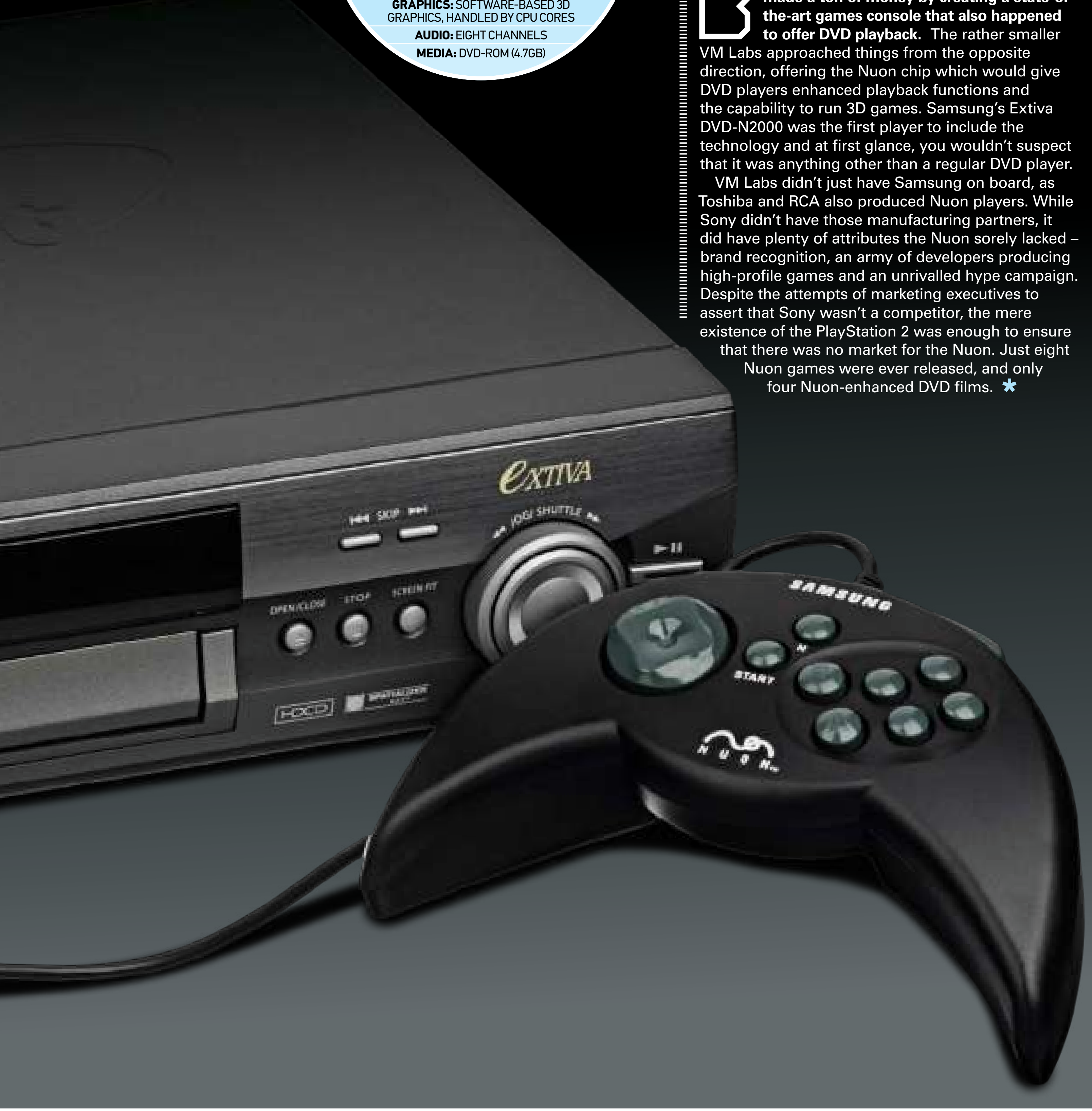
Back at the turn of the Millennium, Sony made a ton of money by creating a state-of-the-art games console that also happened to offer DVD playback. The rather smaller VM Labs approached things from the opposite direction, offering the Nuon chip which would give DVD players enhanced playback functions and the capability to run 3D games. Samsung's Extiva DVD-N2000 was the first player to include the technology and at first glance, you wouldn't suspect that it was anything other than a regular DVD player.

VM Labs didn't just have Samsung on board, as Toshiba and RCA also produced Nuon players. While Sony didn't have those manufacturing partners, it did have plenty of attributes the Nuon sorely lacked – brand recognition, an army of developers producing high-profile games and an unrivalled hype campaign. Despite the attempts of marketing executives to assert that Sony wasn't a competitor, the mere existence of the PlayStation 2 was enough to ensure that there was no market for the Nuon. Just eight Nuon games were ever released, and only four Nuon-enhanced DVD films. *

Nuon Extiva DVD-N2000 fact

■ Nuon wasn't Samsung's first attempt at dabbling with a standardised gaming platform – the company produced a prototype 3DO machine, but never released it.

PROCESSOR: QUAD-CORE 32-BIT MEDIA PROCESSOR ELEMENT CPU (108 MHZ)
RAM: 32MB MAIN DRAM, 64KB VRAM, 8MB VIDEO RAM, 512KB AUDIO RAM
GRAPHICS: SOFTWARE-BASED 3D GRAPHICS, HANDLED BY CPU CORES
AUDIO: EIGHT CHANNELS
MEDIA: DVD-ROM (4.7GB)



A TRIBUTE TO ACQUIRE

SINCE 1994, THE JAPANESE PUBLISHER AND DEVELOPER ACQUIRE HAS CREATED SOME OF THE MOST ADMIRED SAMURAI AND NINJA-RELATED VIDEOGAMES OF THE LAST 30 YEARS. IDIOSYNCRATIC AND FOCUSSED ON ORIGINALITY, IT REMAINS ONE OF JAPAN'S MOST INDIVIDUAL GAMES COMPANIES

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

While developing videogames as he studied at the Teikyo University Of Science And Technology in Uenohara, Japan, student Takuma Endo felt games could take off even further. So when the PlayStation was unveiled by Sony a few months after he graduated, Endo knew it was the start of something special. "I went freelance after I graduated," he tells us, "starting my own business just as the PlayStation was being launched. I wanted to develop a PlayStation game!" The company was Acquire Corporation, and Takuma Endo became its cofounder, CEO and manager.

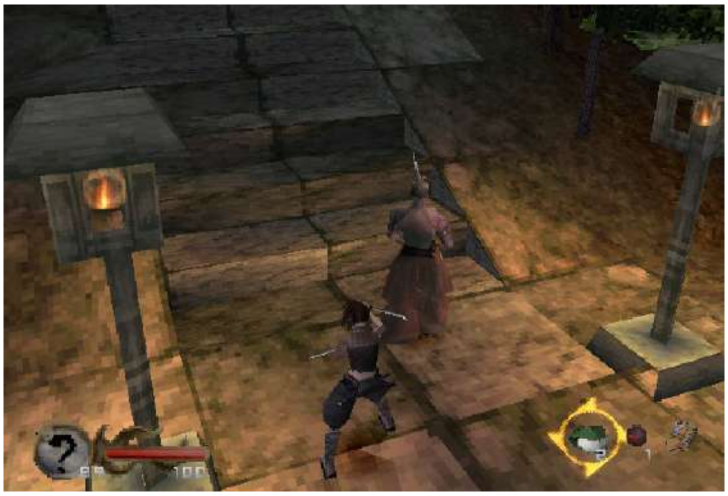
Having been discouraged by Sony as a lone developer, Endo found life as the newly minted Acquire no easier as, somewhat unfairly, the console manufacturer preferred to work with established studios rather than new outfits. Sony Music's Digital Entertainment Program then gave Acquire an opportunity to pitch an idea that the subsidiary would fund and back for the Sony PlayStation. As a result, Endo's company was awarded the contract and spent the next six months developing its game based around a futuristic ninja setting. Despite extensive motion-capture work with famed Japanese martial artist Sho Kosugi and his son Kane, a shift to feudal Japan reinvigorated the project and *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* was born.

With Endo operating as director, planner, writer and even sound editor, Acquire worked on *Tenchu* until its eventual release in 1998. Initially planned for the Japanese market only, American publisher Activision was so impressed that it bought the rights to publish the game in the USA and Europe. *Tenchu* was a hit as audiences lapped up its stealth-based focus, evocatively entwined with a mythical Japanese folklore scenario, and it had the good fortune to be released around the same time as another hit PlayStation stealth game, *Metal Gear Solid*. "I think the missions in the two games are similar," says Endo. "Eliminate your targets without being seen, hiding away from sight to seek a chance to assassinate them."

With *Tenchu* a worldwide smash, Acquire quickly established itself as a developer specialising in games with a Japanese-style theme. Having released the mission pack *Tenchu: Shinobi Hyakusen* in 1999 and then the official sequel (actually a prequel) *Tenchu 2: Birth Of The Stealth Assassins* in 2000, the company turned its attention to a new IP for the PlayStation 2. While maintaining the Japanese feudal setting, *Way Of The Samurai* drops most of the stealth gameplay from *Tenchu*, instead employing an action template to befit the change of warrior type. With its two premier franchises established, Acquire continued to develop both *Tenchu* and *Way Of The Samurai*, occasionally breaking rank to create differing titles, albeit often still with a ninja or samurai theme.

» Takuma Endo became interested in videogames as a student. He set up Acquire in 1994 and has overseen a number of interesting games and franchises.

Under the watchful eyes of Takuma Endo, Acquire continues today. Its most-recent hit, the RPG *Octopath Traveler*, was developed in conjunction with Square Enix and has reported worldwide sales of over 2.5 million units. Nevertheless, with Western interest in Japanese culture stronger than ever, Acquire is sure to continue developing in the style that has seen it become firmly established as one of Japan's quirkiest games companies.



TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS

PLAYSTATION • 1998

Tenchu was Acquire's first game and the stealth-'em-up that propelled the developer upwards. Playing either ninja Rikimaru or Ayame, it's an elegant tale of betrayal and revenge where the ethos of the ninja – live by honour, kill by stealth – is emphasised, with missions completed undetected rewarding the player. Presented in a feudal setting, Acquire drew on Japanese folklore for many of the game's fantastical characters and environments.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

> Our development budget was not sufficient, and it was hard. We did development for other systems to make money and were able to finish *Tenchu*. Even still, we had to cut a lot of what was planned and I would say what was released was about 40 percent of the initial plan.

TENCHU: SHINOBI HYAKAUSEN

PLAYSTATION • 1999

Seeking a way to capitalise on the success of *Tenchu*, Acquire released this Japanese-only expansion in 1999. A collection of fan-created missions, it's appropriate that *Tenchu*'s great rival, *Metal Gear Solid*, did something similar with its own add-on, *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions*. Boasting 100 missions, the idea is a sound one in principle. In practice, however, the contextless missions fail to gel, and the ill-advised introduction of a timer means players can no longer immerse themselves slowly into a mission, often resulting in non-ninja-like dashes across the level.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

> This game was created with submissions from the players themselves who used the map editor. In an era without widespread internet usage, I am amazed we were able to gather all that data.

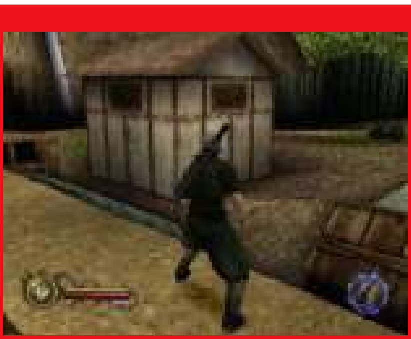
TENCHU 2: BIRTH OF THE STEALTH ASSASSINS

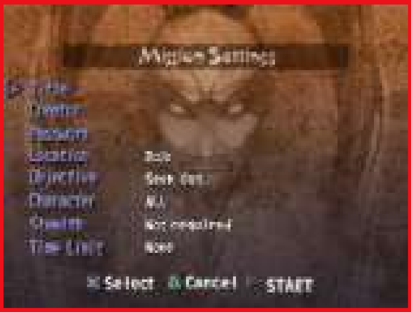
PLAYSTATION • 2000

Set four years before the first game, *Tenchu 2* once more stars the lithe Rikimaru and Ayame, and there's a Shakespearean theme to its backstory. Lord Gohda senior has died, inciting a civil war between his son and brother. Split across three campaigns, each starring Rikimaru, Ayame or the new character of Tatsumaru, the ninjas stalk and slash their enemies, a rogue faction called The Burning Dawn, attempting to bring peace to the domain. Using a similar engine to the original, Takuma Endo returned as director, ensuring that much of the elegant yet deadly charm of the original was retained. ▶

ENDO'S MEMORIES

> I had wanted to make this game for the PlayStation 2, but the publisher requested that it be on PlayStation. As a result, we decided to make it a prequel narratively.





TENCHU 2 FACT FILE

MORE SNIPPETS OF INFO ON THE STEALTHY SEQUEL

SURE WE CAN (NOT)

As with the first game, the appearance of shurikens was still banned according to UK law and replaced with the much safer razor-sharp throwing dart. Phew.

PREQUEL, NOT SEQUEL

The decision to place the events of *Tenchu 2* before *Tenchu* was made easier due to [spoiler alert! – Ed] Rikimaru's demise at the end of the first game.

THAT'S GOTTA HURT

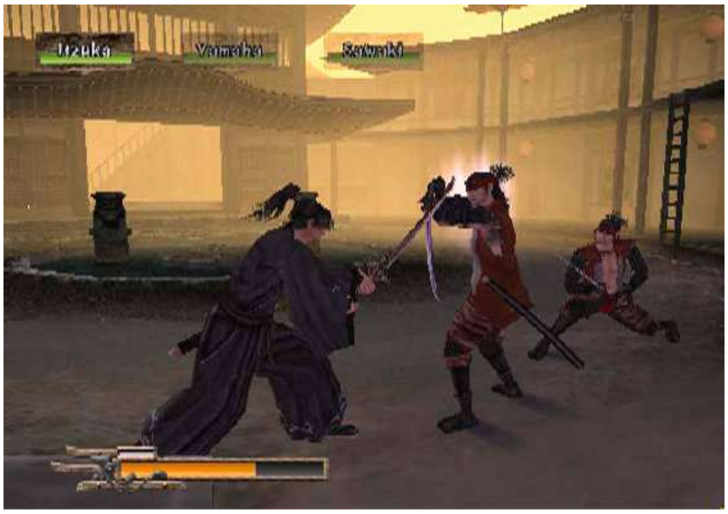
The series' most graphic dismemberments were prohibited in Japan due to strict censorship laws. Gorehounds should seek out the US version, containing even more blood-letting than the European game.

TENCHU MOVES ON

Acquire and Activision's relationship strained during *Tenchu 2*. In the aftermath, the US company bought the rights to the series and commissioned K2 to develop the next game.

WARRING STATES

Like *Tenchu*, Japan's Sengoku period is the backdrop in *Tenchu 2*. It's an era where social upheaval and civil war plagued the country and it adds greatly to *Tenchu 2*'s atmosphere.



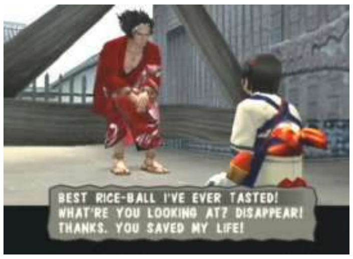
WAY OF THE SAMURAI

PLAYSTATION 2, PSP • 2002

It is the final days of the samurai, the noble warriors now outlawed throughout the land. As warring factions vie for control over feudal Japan, the player stumbles upon one such conflict as a ronin, a wandering samurai who is quickly involved in the bloody conflict. Historically fascinating and highly action-packed compared to the *Tenchu* games, *Way Of The Samurai* employs a branching storyline that causes its plot to change dramatically between plays. Having been ousted from the *Tenchu* series by Activision, *Way Of The Samurai* was Acquire's attempt at a rival IP.

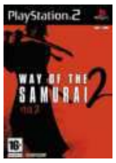
ENDO'S MEMORIES

> In this game, we strove to have much more freedom in development and tried to make the scenario as interactive as possible. In the middle, it felt like it could become a bit boring, so we livened things up with the sword collecting and player growth aspects.


BEST RICE-BALL I'VE EVER TASTED!
WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING AT? DISAPPEAR!
THANKS. YOU SAVED MY LIFE!

WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2

PLAYSTATION 2, PSP • 2003



The second game in Acquire's samurai-based series improved on most of the elements that had made the original a hit in its native country. The intrinsic cause-and-effect model remains, influencing future events through your decisions, as does the emphasis on sword fighting and the timely introduction of a parry/guard technique. Once more, collecting swords and tailoring your weapon to your particular style is a must, and while its plot may not be especially revolutionary, there is still plenty to enjoy in this sequel for fans of the series. *Tenchu* composer Noriyuki Asakura returned for soundtrack duties.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

> We thought carefully about the first game and decreased the number of possible routes by a bit. The game was modelled after Dejima in Nagasaki.

SAMURAI WESTERN

PLAYSTATION 2 • 2005

Owing more than a debt to the *Shanghai Noon* movies starring Jackie Chan, *Samurai Western* transplants the Eastern ethic of Acquire's previous games to a Wild West setting. As in *Way Of The Samurai*, there are plenty of swords to discover, each with different offensive and defensive qualities. In single-player mode, the game stars Gojiro as a man on a mission to locate and kill his brother. In the time-honoured fashion, Gojiro is slowly drawn into a local conflict, facing off against the goons of the local tyrant, Goldberg. The action-focussed and intensely bloody *Samurai Western* is a fun, flawed romp.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

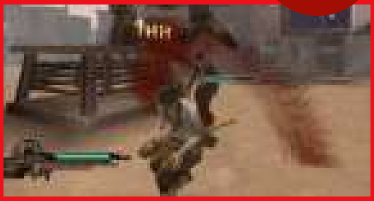
> We had been making games based on the older eras of Japan, so we were starting to run out of ideas. So we decided to throw a samurai into the Wild West. We tried with model guns, but it turns out dodging bullets is nearly impossible.

WESTERN PROMISE

WHEN EAST MEETS WEST IN SAMURAI WESTERN

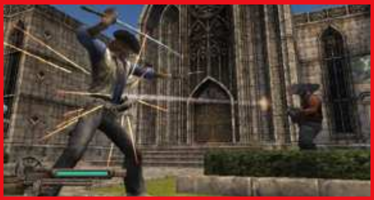
BLOODY HELL

Gojiro's blade cuts a bloody swathe throughout the Wild West, huge ribbons of crimson adorning each level. We'd hate to be whoever has to clear up the mess.



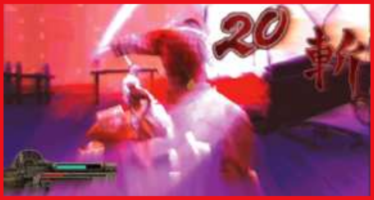
BULLET TIME

Think you've got this swordsman in your sights? Think again because Gojiro is an expert at dodging bullets and can even deflect them with his sword.



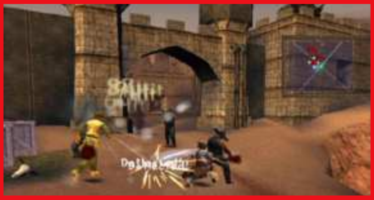
ONE HIT ONE KILL

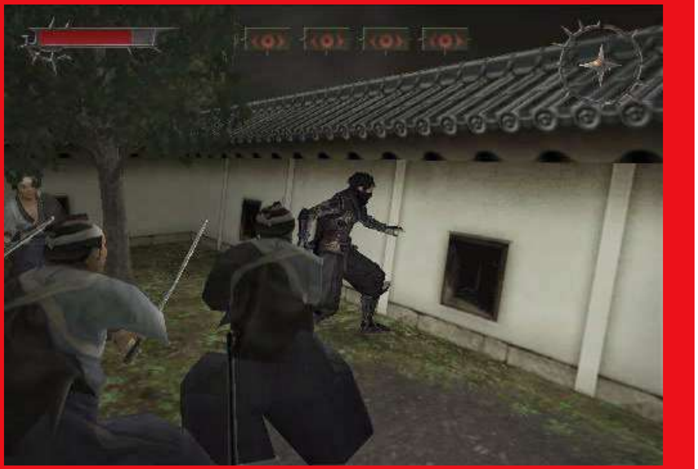
Filling up Gojiro's Master Meter allows him to engage Master Mode. While he cannot dodge at this time, this powerful blow can fell many enemies with just one swipe.



BRING A FRIEND

Samurai Western has a co-op mode that introduces the gunslinging Ralph to assist Gojiro. While lacking the samurai's skills, Ralph does have a gun. Obviously.





SHINOBIDO: WAY OF THE NINJA

PLAYSTATION 2 • 2005

Cast adrift from the *Tenchu* series, Acquire paused the development of its *Way Of The Samurai* games to create a new IP based around the ninja warrior. *Shinobido* stars Goh, a ninja who awakes beside a river with no memory of his life before that moment. With the aid of a mysterious benefactor, Goh slowly pieces together the dramatic events that have led to his amnesia – his ninja clan, the Asuka, has suffered a horrendous defeat, of which he is the lone survivor. Throughout the game, Goh discovers strands of treachery and betrayal as he attempts to recover the eight mystical stones that hold his memories and soul. Utilising much of the gameplay that made the *Tenchu* series such a hit seven years earlier, *Shinobido* finally allowed Takuma Endo and his team to create a stealthy ninja game for the PlayStation 2.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

> This was the first time we developed a game using an externally developed engine. It was tough going, but thanks to it, we were able to implement physics, among other things.

IN ALL BUT NAME

HOW SHINOBIDO: WAY OF THE NINJA HARKS BACK TO THE ORIGINAL TENCHU

KI-METER

As in *Tenchu*, *Shinobido* employs a range meter that gives Goh a preternatural idea of where his enemies lurk.

FLIGHT NOT FIGHT

Like Rikimaru and Ayame, Goh is an able swordsman but much more effective operating from the shadows, assassinating unaware opponents.

OPEN SEASON

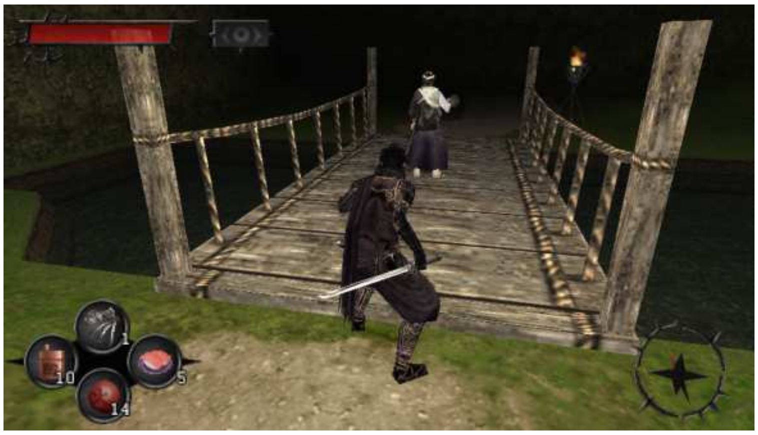
As in the original *Tenchu* games, *Shinobido*'s missions are entirely open, leaving players to explore and kill at their leisure.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS YOUR FRIEND

Goh can – and indeed must – use the environment to his advantage, scaling rooftops, walls and ledges. Rikimaru and Ayame would approve.

FAN EXPANSION

In a nod to *Tenchu: Shinobi Hyakausen*, Acquire released *Shinobido Takumi*, another collection of fan-made levels, a year after *Shinobido*'s release.



SHINOBIDO: TALES OF THE NINJA

PSP • 2006

This PSP exclusive continues the story of the Asuka clan from the first *Shinobido* game. After the defeat of Gamuran in *Way Of The Ninja*, a war in Utakata has been averted. But, alas, as the remains of the Asuka clan and the locals begin to rebuild their shattered land, evil lurks once more. *Tales Of The Ninja* continues the betrayal themes of Acquire's previous games as Goh investigates an attack by mysterious assailants during the wedding ceremony of Nobutera Ichijo, Daimyo Of Utakata. Relishing the opportunity to revisit the themes of its original *Tenchu* games, Acquire extended the *Shinobido* universe in 2007 with this handheld sequel to PlayStation 2's *Way Of The Ninja*. Developed in-house at Acquire, the gameplay is essentially the same, albeit with a few tweaks necessary from the shift of platform. For example, the new control system means only four items can be carried, and the cutscenes of the original are largely absent. Sadly, the squeeze down to the PSP doesn't work, with a wonky camera and muddy visuals combining to make *Tales Of The Ninja* a bit of a mess.

WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS, MY LORD?

PSP • 2007

Acquire took a sharp turn from its historical work with this quirky handheld strategy series in 2007. Echoing the Bullfrog PC classic, *Dungeon Keeper*, the player is a humble minion, creating an underground lair for its evil master before helping to defend it against the constant threat of do-gooder heroes. To this aim, the player tries to create the perfect defensive ecosystem, digging tunnels and creating monsters to battle the heroes while hiding their master, the titular demon lord, Badman, from the invaders. Originally titled *Holy Invasion Of Privacy, Badman!*, the Western release of this PSP game was changed to avoid confusion with the *Batman* franchise. After all, there's no way Batman would loiter around a dingy underground lair. The cult hit has inspired two sequels, *What Did I Do To Deserve This, My Lord? 2* in 2008 and *No Heroes Allowed* in 2010. ▶

ENDO'S MEMORIES

> This is the work where we really pivoted away from games set in older eras of Japan. We had only created 3D games up to this point, so it was our first attempt at a game in pixel art.

TENCHU: SHADOW ASSASSINS

WII, PSP • 2008

TENCHU
SHADOW ASSASSINS

When Fromsoftware took over the *Tenchu* franchise from Activision in 2004, Acquire secured the development of this Wii spinoff. Troubles continue to plague Lord Gohda's land together with the inevitable betrayals and political intrigue, and *Shadow Assassins* plays to the Wii's strengths by using the Wii remote as a replacement sword during fights. Yet while the stealth gameplay and evocative feudal Japanese backdrop are present, the lack of an open-world structure and the ability for the player to approach a mission in their own way makes *Shadow Assassins* feel like a different series.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

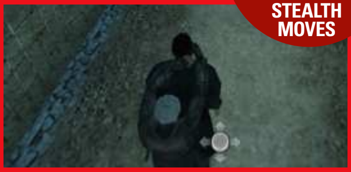
We finally had a chance to make another *Tenchu* game; however, we had to make it suitable for the Nintendo Wii. In effect, we took out the main sales point of the series, the open-ended structure, and failed by turning it into a linear game.

KILL BY STEALTH

DESPITE SOMETIMES BEING UNARMED, RIKIMARU HAS A RANGE OF DEADLY HISSATSU STEALTH MOVES

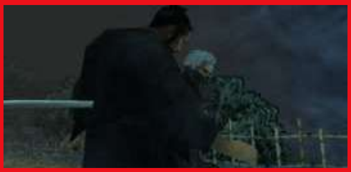
NECK SNAP

Simply performing the hissatsu without pressing a direction key causes Rikimaru to grab the opponent and bloodlessly snap their neck.



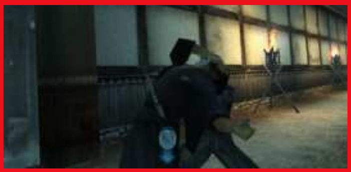
SWORD SWIPE

Pressing right on the controller during the hissatsu means Rikimaru grabs his opponent's sword and assassinates them with a stab from their own weapon.



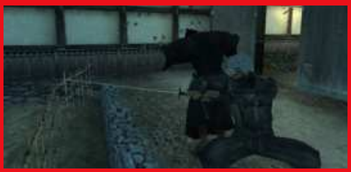
BACK PUNCH

Press down during a hissatsu and Rikimaru will disable his opponent by punching them in the back before again killing them with their own sword.



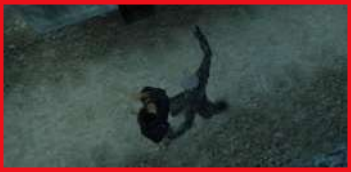
SLASH

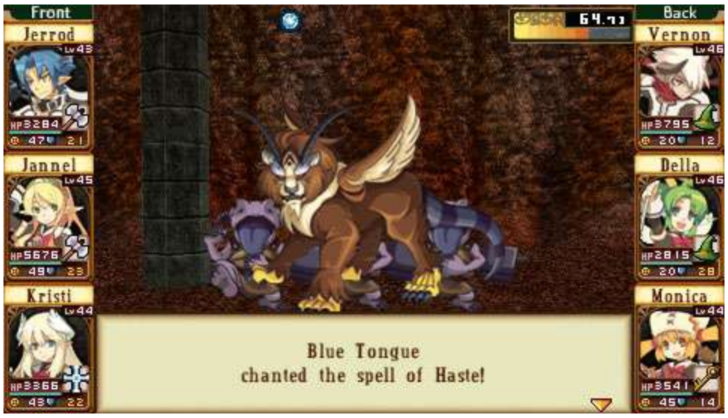
Rikimaru skillfully manipulates his target, grabbing their sword as they spin around before executing them with a powerful gut slash.



PUNCH AND SNAP

Pressing up during a hissatsu makes Rikimaru punch his opponent before snapping their neck in one fluid and lethal move.





Blue Tongue chanted the spell of Haste!

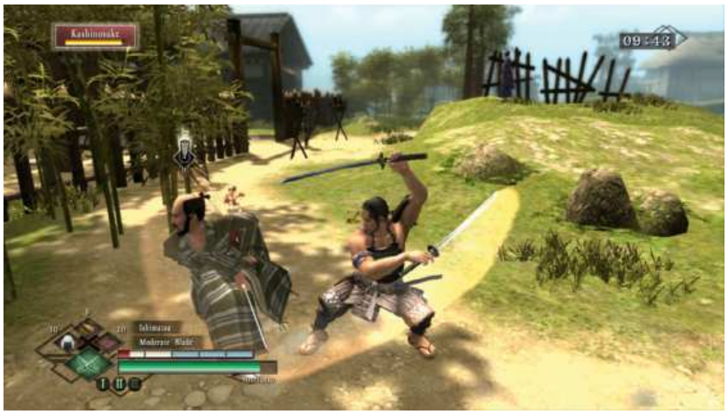
CLASS OF HEROES

PSP • 2008

Developed by Zero Div, Acquire published this RPG in Japan in 2008. The game begins at the Particus Academy as the player selects and defines their party from a list of ten playable races. From here, you can enter into random dungeon quests, regularly encountering monsters with the game's turn-based combat system. Given how much its gameplay relies on grinding, how you view *Class Of Heroes* depends on whether you enjoy countless battles with the sole aim of levelling up your characters. Yet while it's unlikely to convert any new fans to the genre thanks to its vertical difficulty curve, it's a solid RPG with plenty of options to discover. *Class Of Heroes*' success inspired three more games in the series, and a digital western version of *Class Of Heroes 2G*, released in 2015.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

This 3D dungeon crawler RPG was created by a talented team who were formed from a team received in a merger. This game was the impetus for us to handle our own sales.



WAY OF THE SAMURAI 3

PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC • 2008

PS3
WAY OF THE SAMURAI 3

Acquire brought its *Samurai* games to the seventh generation of consoles in 2008 and changed little of the core ethos behind the series. Once more, the player adopts a lone samurai during the Sengoku period of feudal Japan, exploring an open world while performing quests and making critical decisions that affect both the samurai's honour and the game's ending. Inevitably, swords and combat play a significant part, and the player can also uniquely make decisions during cutscenes, altering their destiny. With its effective enemy system, day/night cycle and plenty of atmospheric locations and weaponry options, this is another solid entry in the *Way Of The Samurai* series.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

We had some budgetary constraints and weren't able to arrange the budget we would have liked for the character models.

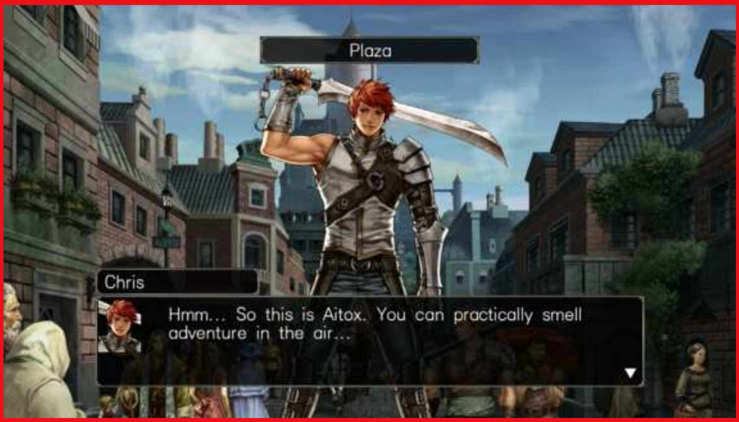
WIZARDRY: LABYRINTH OF LOST SOULS

PC, PLAYSTATION 3, IOS, VITA • 2009

The *Wizardry* series has had a chequered history since it first appeared on the Apple II in 1981, and this ninth episode in the famous RPG series was developed by Acquire's in-house team and published by Xseed Games outside of Japan. As befits the game's history, it's a classic dungeon crawler focussing on continual combat, although its acute difficulty curve can be off-putting for newcomers. Much of the gameplay harks back to the classic entries of the series, so if you're after some nostalgia-based hack-and-slash, *Labyrinth Of Lost Souls* is a good bet. Released on the PlayStation Network in 2009, there have been subsequent ports to the Vita (Japan only, in 2015) and PC (in 2020). Acquire also spent much of 2010 and 2011 releasing DLC items for the PlayStation 3 version.

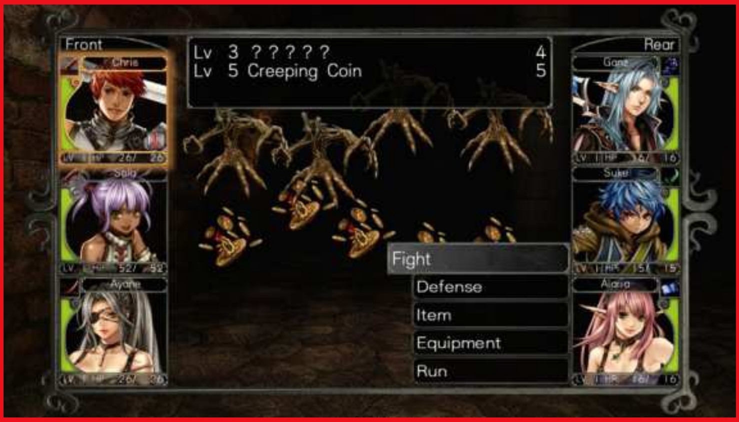
ENDO'S MEMORIES

> Our internal team, who is skilled at developing DRPGs, handled this one. It was a download-only title, and we learned a lot from the experience of making it.



Chris

Hmm... So this is Aitox. You can practically smell adventure in the air...



AND THERE'S MORE

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE BEST OF THE LABYRINTH'S DLC

DUNGEON OF TRIALS

A high character level extension that adds more depth – literally – to the main game. With new quests and monsters, this is only for experienced parties.

SCRIPTURE OF BURIAL

This old parchment holds a very fearsome curse. Uttering its words will command the soil and rocks and bury your opponents alive.

HOLY ARMOR

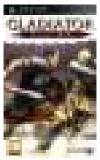
A mystical suit of armour that feels balanced and light while offering supreme protection from god itself. Just don't put it on if you're evil.

BIZEN OSAFUNE

If you want to channel your inner samurai in *Wizardry*, this katana is an outstanding blade. There is, however, a strange glow to this powerful weapon.

GLADIATOR BEGINS

PSP • 2010

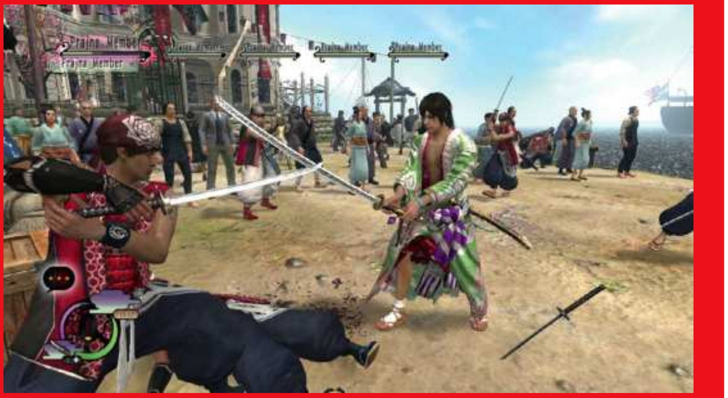


Koei's minor hit, *Colosseum: Road To Freedom*, received this follow-up – actually a prequel – in 2010. Published by Acquire in Japan, it was an attempt to continue the company's historical work while diversifying into a different era. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to the film *Gladiator*, the game concerns a young fighter thrust into the colosseum at a turbulent time for the Roman Empire. The choice of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus' successor is causing a feud between the aristocracy and military, the latter keen to propose its own candidate for the throne, General Cassius, instead of Antoninus' son, Commodus. *Gladiator Begins* follows the nameless gladiator as they tackle the arena, upgrading their skills and equipment with each passing victory. With many grinding elements from the RPG genre present, it's unlikely *Gladiator Begins* would have ever found a huge following. Nevertheless, it's a decent attempt at recreating the life of a young up-and-coming Roman gladiator.

CLAN OF CHAMPIONS

PLAYSTATION 3, PC • 2011

The *Colosseum*/*Gladiator* series has gained something of a cult following over the years, so it was no surprise to see Acquire attempt to update it into a modern multiplayer model. *Clan Of Champions* (also known as *Gladiator Vs*) pitches players into teams and against each other in a battle to become champion of the eponymous online arena. Each warrior has a physical attack while magical spells are available for longer-range combat, and while a single-player mode exists, you'll need the help of friends to practice and improve to any meaningful level. Developed by Acquire itself, it also handled Japanese distribution, while NIS America took care of publication stateside. Sadly, while the concept is a sound one, the execution is a little careless, especially with the somewhat barebones PC port of the PlayStation 3 original. Many expected elements are present: character creation, upgrades and levelling up, but each is bog-standard and unimaginative. Most damningly is the lifeless and bland combat system, the meat and bones of an action game such as *Clan Of Champions*.



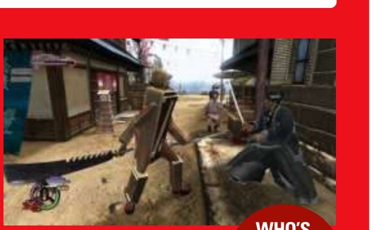
WAY OF THE SAMURAI 4

PLAYSTATION 3, PC • 2011

Set in the fictional port of Amihama during the final days of the Edo period in Japanese history, this fourth effort in the *Way Of The Samurai* series continues the previous games' themes with its interactive cutscenes, branching storylines and equipment customisation. However, there's a new flavour to the game's plot as three factions – pro-government, anti-government and the British Navy – vie for control of Amihama. Set over five unstable days, the player's samurai can spend their time romancing (unsubtly called 'night crawling'), running their own dojo and, of course, fighting. Unpolished and rough in places, *Way Of The Samurai 4* is another fascinating open-world dip into Japanese history.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

We thought the last days of the samurai was a very compelling theme, so we decided to set the game at the end of the Edo period. We wanted the game to have an impact, but I think we went too hard on the humorous elements.



A CHAOTIC CAST

WHO'S WHO IN WAY OF THE SAMURAI 4

COUNT JET JENKINS

The leader of the British consortium in Amihama, although he's regularly found gambling at the local casino. He's an expert in pistol and rapier combat.

KINUGAWA SISTERS

These three young ladies will submit the samurai to horrendous torture should he cross their master and father, Onsen Kinugawa, a chief minister in the government.

REDDO AKAGI

Leader of the Isolationists, a group fighting to protect Japanese culture from foreign invaders. Hates all foreigners. Especially the British. I say!

GUNJI DOJIMA

Gunji is the local swordsmith who, for a price, will repair, upgrade and purchase your weapons. This is Gunji's fourth appearance in the series.

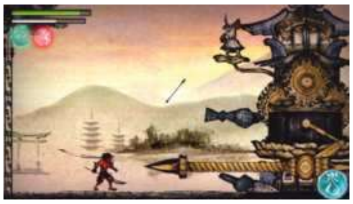
AKEMI

Owner of the Toasty Truth Bar and secretly a member of the Isolationists. Friendly and attractive, she's an expert at gathering information.

SHINOBIDO 2: REVENGE OF ZEN

VITA • 2011

Seven years after the original *Shinobido* PlayStation 2 game, Acquire launched this Vita exclusive, an early game on the handheld. Unfortunately, technically, the game betrays its PS2 origins, and many of the camera issues that dogged the original *Tenchu* games from 14 years earlier remain. The player assumes the role of Zen, a wronged ninja seeking, well, revenge. Throughout various missions, Zen stalks and skulks, eliminating enemies stealthily or in clumsy open combat. Sadly, as support for the Vita dwindles online, you'll have to hunt down an expensive physical copy of the game to experience this somewhat flat and average reimagining of the *Tenchu* series.



SUMIONI: DEMON ARTS

VITA, ANDROID • 2012

Developed by Acquire and released by Xseed Games in the West, *Sumioni* is the tale of Tengan, chancellor of a mystical land and the only man who can stop the evil summoner Seimei. Condemned to prison, Tengan sacrifices himself by summoning a Sumioni (ink demon) called Agura to travel the charred ruins of Japan and destroy Seimei. Sumioni's unique art style, based around Japanese ink brush paintings, is an absolute delight, as is the ink mechanic – using the Vita's touchscreen, the player can draw platforms to help Agura negotiate the terrain. Ultimately, Sumioni is a novel and beautiful game that's certainly worth investigating.

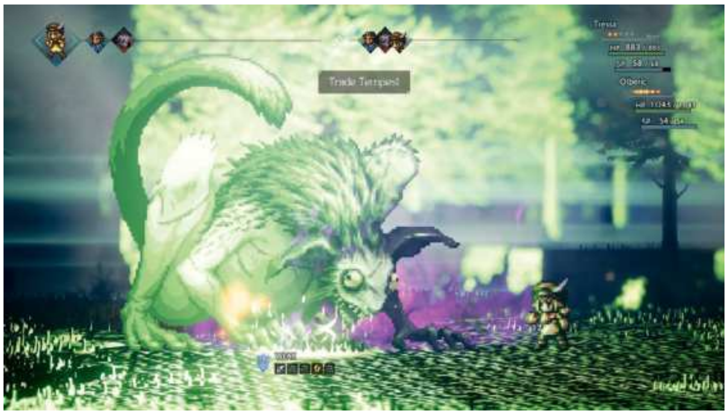
RAIN

PLAYSTATION 3 • 2013

This distinctive and enchanting PlayStation 3 game follows a small boy as he chases an invisible girl through the rain-soaked streets of a mysterious city. Deeply artistic, mournful and captivating, *Rain*'s gameplay contains puzzles of both an artistic and environmental inclination as its young protagonist endeavours to save the girl from ghostly creatures. *Rain* is known as *Lost In The Rain* in Japan, where it also had its sole (and now expensive) physical release.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

This game began from the art rather than the game design. We supported a creator who had never developed a game before and took the rare approach of creating a game from a concept CG.



OCTOPATH TRAVELER

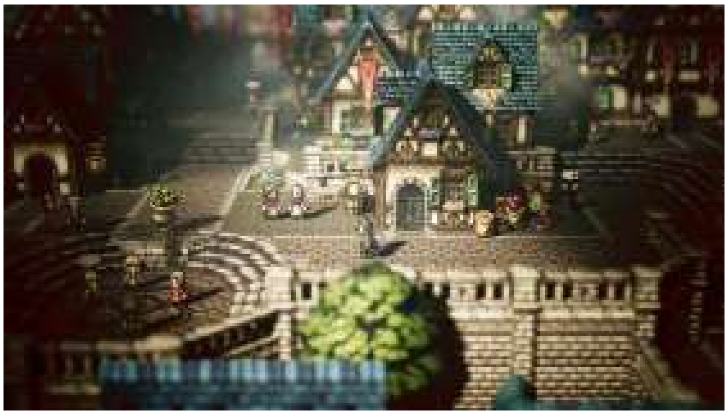
SWITCH, PC, XBOX ONE • 2018

OCTOPATH TRAVELER

This RPG utilises a display aesthetic dubbed HD-2D as Acquire infused its modern game with a pixelated retro sheen. There's a touch of old-school with *Octopath Traveler*'s turn-based gameplay, while its combat, presentation and character progression all won high praise upon release. With almost three million individual sales worldwide, *Octopath Traveler* is Acquire's biggest-selling game since the original *Tenchu* 20 years earlier. A sequel is planned for 2023.

ENDO'S MEMORIES

> This was our first million-seller since *Tenchu*. It's also the first time in a while where we created pixel art. We struggled to create a game that exaggerated yet met the positive and happy memories of players from the Super Nintendo era.

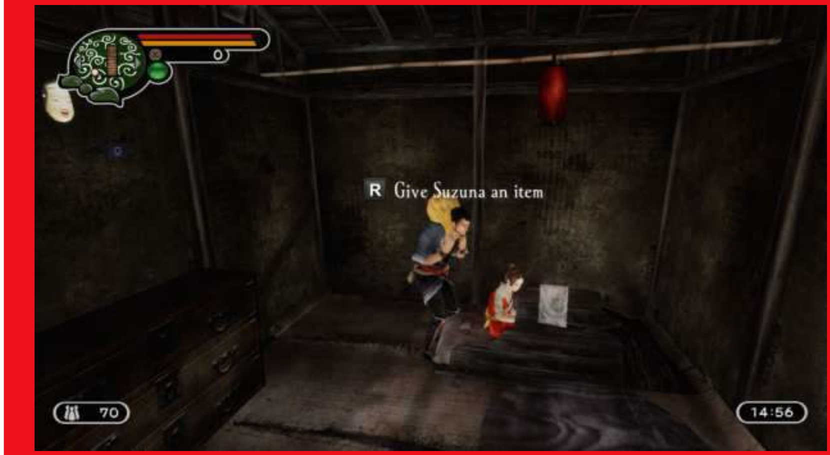


HONOURING OCTOPATH

THE OLD-SCHOOL RPG THAT BECAME A COMMERCIAL AND CRITICAL HIT

2018
GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS
AMD

In addition to being Acquire's best-selling game, RPG *Octopath Traveler* also received considerable industry recognition, notably scooping up the Nintendo Game Of The Year Award at the 2018 Golden Joystick Award ceremony. Unsurprisingly, *Octopath Traveler*'s art direction won many plaudits, with the game nominated for Best Art Direction at The Game Awards 2018 in Los Angeles and Excellence In Art at the SXSW Gaming Awards the same year. Finally, the long-running Japanese games magazine, *Famitsu*, celebrated *Octopath Traveler* with a trio of accolades during its 2018 ceremony, the Acquire/Square Enix RPG securing the Rookie award (alongside *Detroit: Become Human*), Best Game Music award and one of 12 games feted in the Excellence prize.



KAMIWAZA: WAY OF THE THIEF

PC, SWITCH, PLAYSTATION 4 • 2022

The latest game from Acquire is an interesting one, as its roots can be found in the past. *Way Of The Thief* is actually a remaster of Acquire's PlayStation 2 game *Kamiwaza* and as a result it has had numerous updates to ensure its stealth-based action will appeal to modern gamers.

TAKUMA ENDO ON REMASTERING ACQUIRE'S 2006 STEALTH GAME KAMIWAZA

Why did you choose to remaster *Kamiwaza: Way Of The Thief*?

Because it has a unique action gameplay style that still hasn't been replicated to this day. It also has the uniqueness of featuring a Japanese thief main character who has an arabesque-patterned furoshiki. I think that even players today will find it fresh and interesting.

How will this version differ from the original game?

We didn't change anything from an atmospheric perspective, but we did update and refine the textures and make the game fully HD so it has been greatly improved visually. We also added an auto-save feature and more tutorials to aid in ease of play. Finally, we added a system, like in *Shinobido*, where you can change the main character's appearance and we added some secrets as well.

How difficult has the new version been to make, and what challenges did the team face?

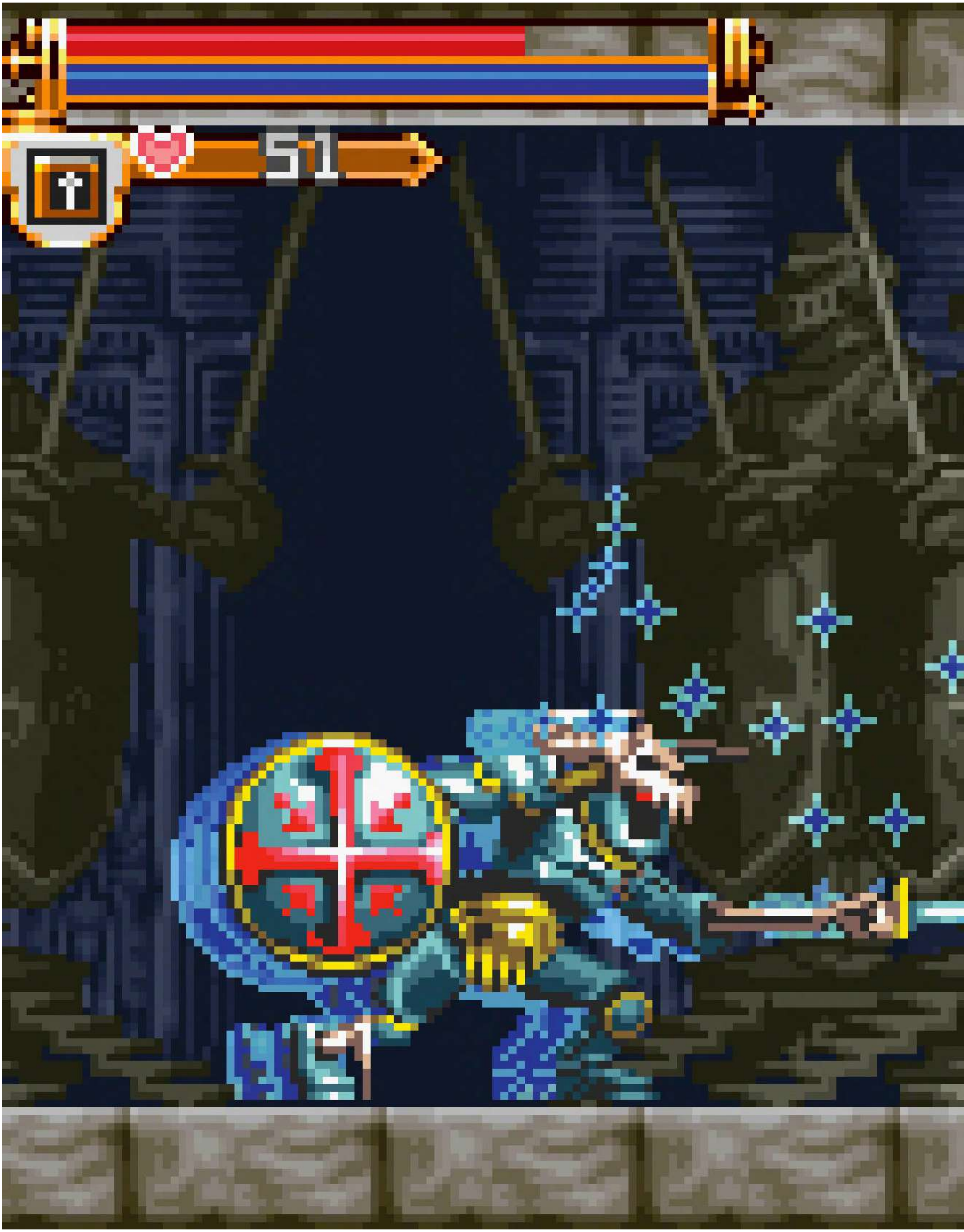
Because the game is very unique, it was difficult to appropriately explain the game systems. In order to overcome that, we had staff who weren't familiar with the game playtest it and based on their feedback, we added tutorials and improved the user interface.

Would you say there's more interest in the localisation of quirkier Japanese games than there was during the PlayStation 2 era?

I think it's more difficult now to sell games abroad than in the PlayStation 2 era, and that is because so many are made without the foreign market in mind. That said, while *Kamiwaza* is a niche game, I think it is very fun, and I hope players abroad are able to enjoy it as a type of 'fantasy' game.

Acquire is still going strong after 30 years, what's the secret to the company's success?

While we aren't on the cutting edge of technology or technical refinement, I believe that we are a company that has broadened the potential of originality and that that has brought us this far. I would like for us to remain adaptable to changes and the continuing evolution of the industry.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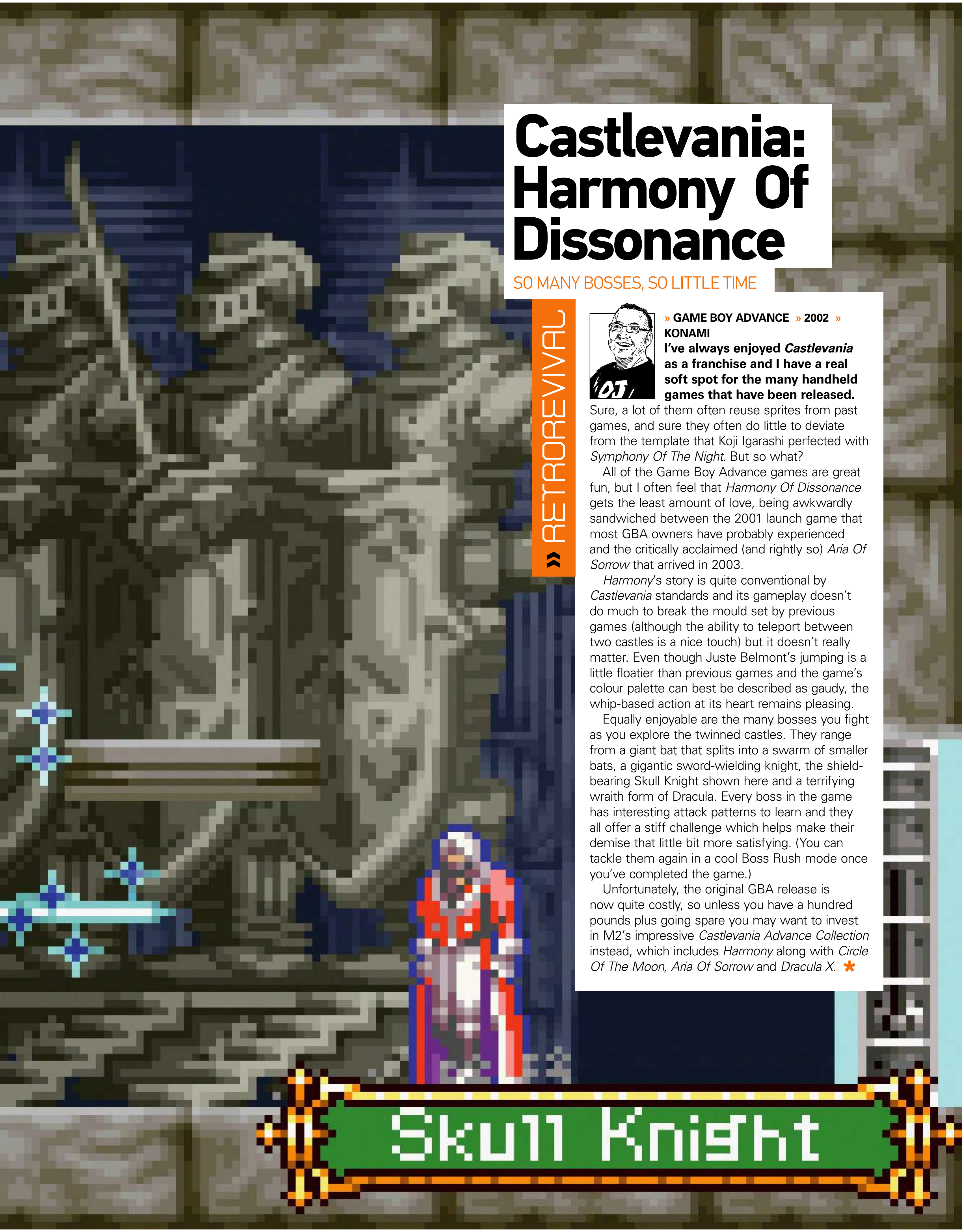


Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance

SO MANY BOSSES, SO LITTLE TIME

» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2002 » KONAMI

I've always enjoyed *Castlevania* as a franchise and I have a real soft spot for the many handheld games that have been released. Sure, a lot of them often reuse sprites from past games, and sure they often do little to deviate from the template that Koji Igarashi perfected with *Symphony Of The Night*. But so what?

All of the Game Boy Advance games are great fun, but I often feel that *Harmony Of Dissonance* gets the least amount of love, being awkwardly sandwiched between the 2001 launch game that most GBA owners have probably experienced and the critically acclaimed (and rightly so) *Aria Of Sorrow* that arrived in 2003.

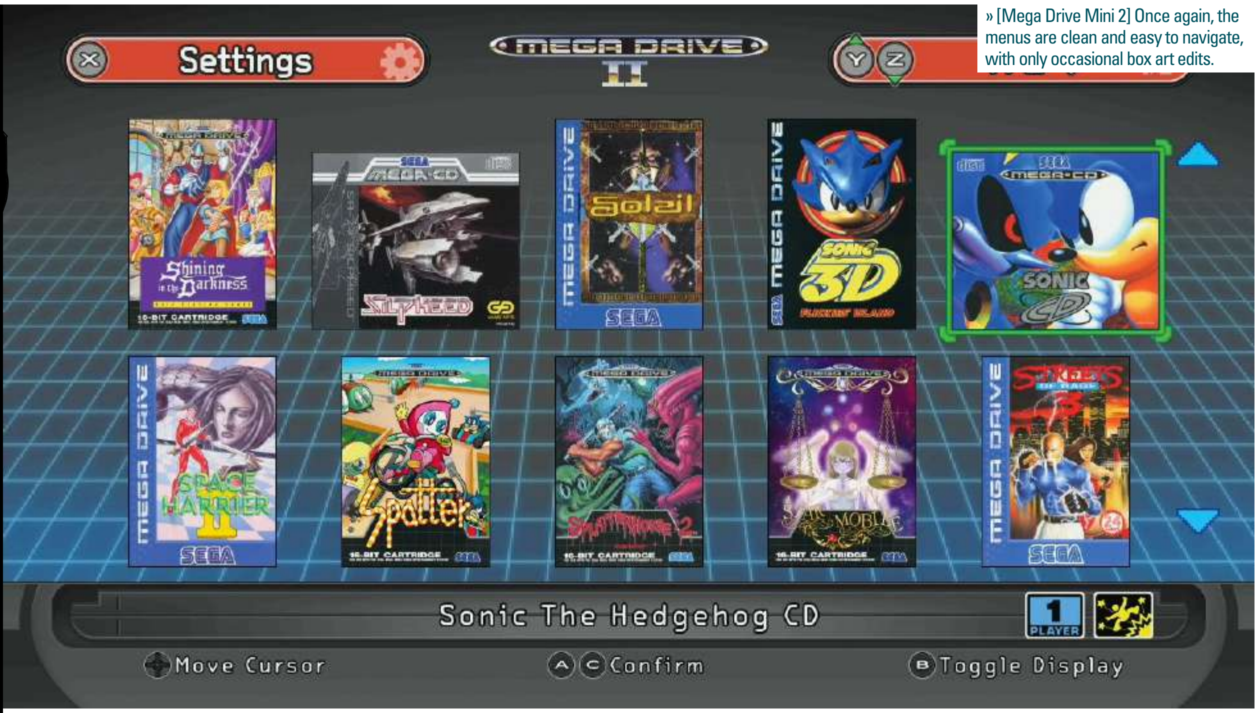
Harmony's story is quite conventional by *Castlevania* standards and its gameplay doesn't do much to break the mould set by previous games (although the ability to teleport between two castles is a nice touch) but it doesn't really matter. Even though Juste Belmont's jumping is a little floatier than previous games and the game's colour palette can best be described as gaudy, the whip-based action at its heart remains pleasing.

Equally enjoyable are the many bosses you fight as you explore the twinned castles. They range from a giant bat that splits into a swarm of smaller bats, a gigantic sword-wielding knight, the shield-bearing Skull Knight shown here and a terrifying wraith form of Dracula. Every boss in the game has interesting attack patterns to learn and they all offer a stiff challenge which helps make their demise that little bit more satisfying. (You can tackle them again in a cool Boss Rush mode once you've completed the game.)

Unfortunately, the original GBA release is now quite costly, so unless you have a hundred pounds plus going spare you may want to invest in M2's impressive *Castlevania Advance Collection* instead, which includes *Harmony* along with *Circle Of The Moon*, *Aria Of Sorrow* and *Dracula X*. *

RETRORATED

>> The Mega Drive Mini 2 is the big talk this month, but we've also got some very Eighties games to look at in the form of Garbage Pail Kids: Mad Mike And The Quest For Stale Gum and Arkanoid: Eternal Battle



» [Mega Drive Mini 2] Once again, the menus are clean and easy to navigate, with only occasional box art edits.

Mega Drive Mini 2

IS IT AS MEGA AS THE ORIGINAL?

INFORMATION

- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £104.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** M2
- » **BUY IT FROM:** AMAZON.CO.UK

Sega has returned for another crack at the mini-console market, and after some interesting detours into its handheld and arcade history, it's going back to its most popular piece of hardware. But can it possibly top a machine that, three years later, is still among the best of its kind?

Like the original, the Mega Drive Mini 2 is a highly faithful half-scale recreation of the original machine, with details like working cartridge slot flaps and removable port covers. The only slight compromise is that it has a sliding power switch like the Japanese console, rather than the push-button switch used for the international machines. The full-size HDMI cable supplied delivers the console's 720p output, and power is delivered via a micro USB cable, though you'll need your own plug adapter. Unlike the original Mega Drive Mini, which came with a pair of three-button pads, you get a single six-button controller here.

Somehow, Sega has managed to put together a list of games that feels like a great representation of the Mega Drive, without repeating games from the previous system. You've got strong original games like *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, *Desert Strike* and *Ristar* alongside recognisable arcade conversions like *Out Run*, *Super Street Fighter II* and *Super Hang-On*. If you're looking for value, there are lengthy games like *Warsong*, *Shining Force II* and *Populous*, plus games like *Soleil*, *Streets Of Rage 3* and *Alien Soldier* that are expensive to acquire for original hardware. There are still a couple of poor games like *OutRunners*, but overall it really is a testament to

SEGA
16-BIT
MEGA DRIVE II

» Sega has said the Mega Drive Mini 2 will be sold in far smaller quantities than the original Mega Drive Mini, so don't be surprised if it sells out fast.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Released in 2019, the Mega Drive Mini was a highly acclaimed plug-and-play retro console featuring 42 games, which did much to atone for the shoddy AtGames Mega Drive products that preceded it. This second version features 61 games, including Mega-CD games and eight previously unreleased bonus games.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

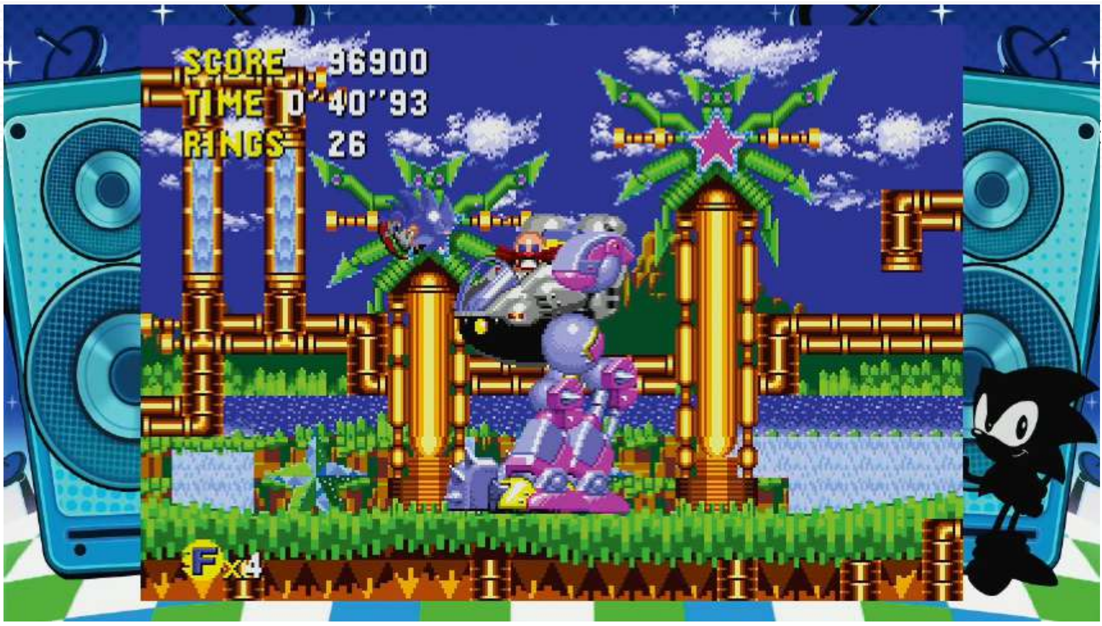
Mega Drive Mini 2

It has been packed up for Christmas, but I did get to play a few games to check it was working. *Silpheed* is still great fun.

NICK

Arkanoid: Eternal Battle

I've been really into bat-and-ball games lately, so this updated blast from the past is particularly well-timed.



» [Mega Drive Mini 2] The Mega-CD games are welcome, but don't expect a comprehensive representation of its library.

the impressive depth of the Mega Drive's library.

There are 12 Mega-CD games included too, and with such a small number people are bound to concentrate on what *isn't* included – no *Snatcher*, no *Eternal Champions* and, unlike the Japanese release, no *Lunar* or *Popful Mail*. It would be a shame to dwell on that though, as games like *Sonic CD*, *Final Fight CD* and the infamous *Night Trap* do add plenty of value to the system. The same goes for the bonus games, as nothing quite matches up to *Tetris* or *Darius*, but we like the eclectic mix of unreleased games and new conversions. *Fantasy Zone* is welcome but the revised *Space Harrier II* designed for the fictional Mega Drive Plus hardware is a real highlight, with the proper sprite scaling doing a lot to improve the game.

Emulation has been handled by M2 again, so the experience is pretty similar to the original Mega Drive Mini. New features include a choice between Mega Drive and Mega Drive 2 sound modes, the former having a more noticeable low-pass filter, and there are more wallpapers. The extra controller buttons now give quicker access to various menu options, and there's a new sorting mode that tracks your most recently played games. Unfortunately the CRT display filter has barely been improved over the previous machine – the scanlines are a little less dark, but that's it. However, it is pretty helpful for making Mega-CD FMV look a little more passable.

Some of the included games have been given some particularly interesting tweaks, which is nice to see. The new Easy Mode for *Phantasy Star II* features fewer enemy battles with greater rewards, *Out Run* features new music, and *Thunder Force IV* has a High Speed Mode that removes the original game's slowdown. *Sonic CD* offers a choice of European or US versions, which goes beyond the soundtrack as the 50Hz timing is retained for the PAL version. Fortunately, just as before, Japanese versions of every game can be accessed by changing the system language.

So, is it better than the original Mega Drive Mini? We'd say it's a close run thing. Although this new machine has more games and some slight improvements, it's more expensive (albeit justifiably), doesn't have the second controller and its library is geared slightly more towards hardcore fans, so the original might just shade it. Even so, the Mega Drive Mini 2 is a great bit of kit in its own right, and it's highly recommended. ✱

✱ WHAT'S INCLUDED?

▼ SEGA'S SYSTEM HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

MEGA DRIVE GAMES: AFTER BURNER II • ALIEN SOLDIER • ATOMIC RUNNER • BONANZA BROS • CLAYFIGHTER • DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF • EARTHWORM JIM 2 • ELEMENTAL MASTER • FATAL FURY 2 • GAIN GROUND • GOLDEN AXE II • GRANADA • HELLFIRE • HERZOG ZWEI • MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE • OUT RUN • OUTRUNNERS • PHANTASY STAR II • POPULOUS • RAINBOW ISLANDS EXTRA • RANGER-X • RISTAR • ROLLING THUNDER 2 • SHADOW DANCER: THE SECRET OF SHINOBI • SHINING FORCE II • SHINING IN THE DARKNESS • SOLEIL • SONIC 3D: FLICKIES' ISLAND • SPLATTERHOUSE 2 • STREETS OF RAGE 3 • SUPER HANG-ON • SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS • THE OOZE • THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI • THUNDER FORCE IV • TOEJAM & EARL IN PANIC ON FUNKOTRON • TRUXTON • VECTORMAN 2 • VIEWPOINT • VIRTUA RACING • WARSONG

MEGA-CD GAMES: ECCO THE DOLPHIN • ECCO: THE TIDES OF TIME • FINAL FIGHT CD • NIGHT STRIKER • NIGHT TRAP • ROBO ALESTE • SEWER SHARK • SHINING FORCE CD • SILPHEED • SONIC CD • THE NINJA WARRIORS • YUMEMI MYSTERY MANSION

BONUS GAMES: DEVI & PII • FANTASY ZONE • SPACE HARRIER II + SPACE HARRIER • SPATTER • STAR MOBILE • SUPER LOCOMOTIVE • VS PUYO PUYO SUN

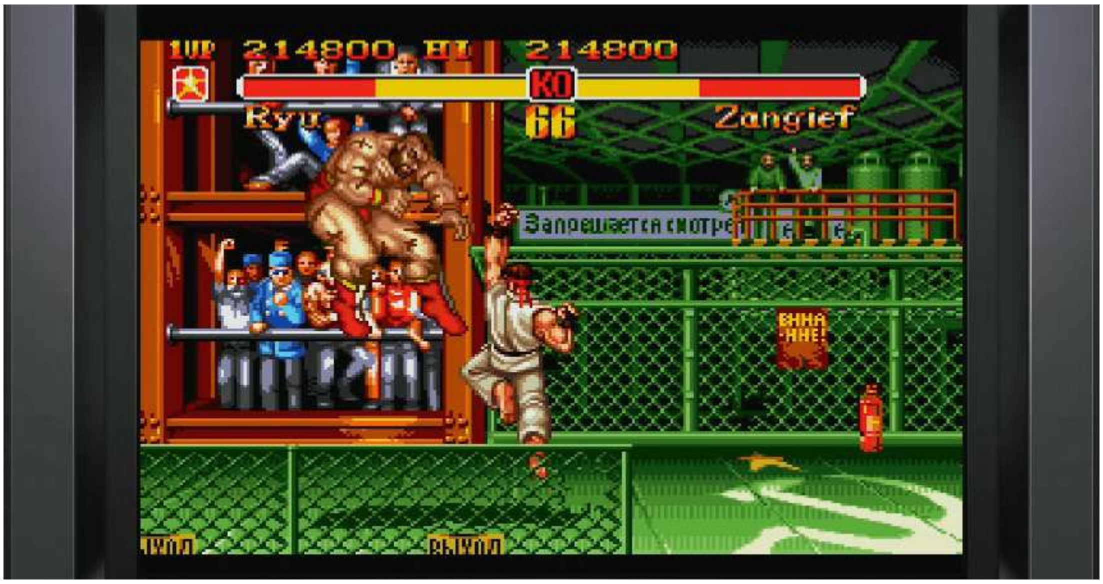
IN A NUTSHELL

Whether you're a Sega enthusiast or a newcomer to the system, the Mega Drive Mini 2 is a great device that offers variety, quality and value for money.

» [Mega Drive Mini 2] Games like *Shining Force CD* offer both financial value and plenty of play time.

» [Mega Drive Mini 2] The section with enemy Ash has been cut from *Bare Knuckle III*.

» [Mega Drive Mini 2] With over 60 games, you're bound to end up with a duffer like *ClayFighter*.



» [Mega Drive Mini 2] The six-button controller really is of huge importance for games like *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers*.

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade Multi Game Cartridges

» System: Evercade **» Buy it for:** £17.99 **» Buy it from:** Online, retail

We've been graced with two new Evercade cartridges this month and both should find a way into your collection. First up is *The C64 Collection 1*, which is the first selection of home-computer games to be released on Evercade. Fourteen games are included, with the vast majority consisting of titles released under the Epyx and Hewson labels. Highlights include *Impossible Mission*, *Winter Games*, *Jumpman*, *Gateway To Apshai* and *Lee*, which is *Bruce Lee* without the licence.

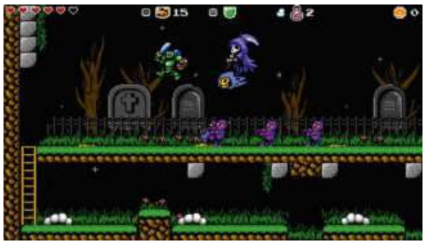
While there's a decent mix of genres represented, from sports to platformers, shoot-'em-ups are the most dominant, and they range from the great (Jeff Minter's *Iridis Alpha*) to the poor (*Subterranea*).

Blaze has been quite canny with its choice of games as few of them require the virtual keyboard that has been included. It's initially tricky to use (and hard to see on the handheld), but you do eventually get used to it, although it certainly makes the likes of *Impossible Mission* and the *Games* releases a little trickier to play. Emulation seems solid, although we'd advise you to stick with the Pixel Perfect option when playing on a TV as the output looks quite fuzzy.

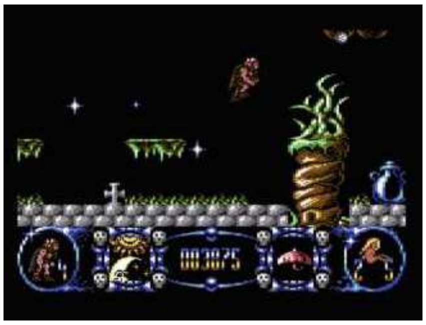
» Score **80%**

Blaze's second offering consists of the platformer *Alwa's Awakening: The 8-Bit Edition* and *Cathedral*, which is the first native port. Both titles are excellent with *Alwa's Awakening* being a clever mix of puzzling and platforming. We'd rate *Cathedral* even higher thanks to its huge scope, Metroidvania-like structure and a fantastic sense of progression. You're only getting two games for your money but they're both superb fun. Just be aware that you'll need Firmware Version 1.3 or higher to run this particular cart.

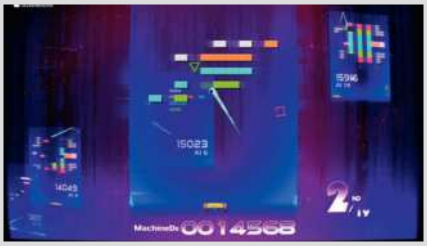
» Score **88%**



» [Evercade] If you like sprawling adventure games you'll absolutely adore *Cathedral*.



» [Evercade] The remaining C64 games are: *Summer Games, Battle Valley, Alleykat, Marauder, The Movie Monster Game, Streets Sports Baseball* and *Stormlord* (shown here).



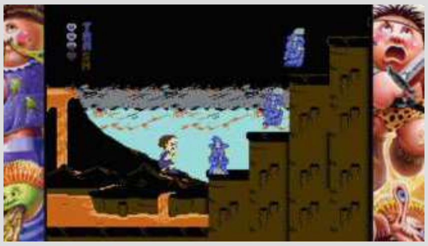
Arkanoid: Eternal Battle

» System: PS5 (tested), PC, PS4, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, **» Buy it for:** £24.99
» Buy it from: Online

Taito's block-breaking arcade hit is the latest classic game to be given a battle royale makeover. Up to 25 players can participate and power-ups can be directed at your opponents to hinder them. Unfortunately it doesn't work as well as you'd hope – the feeling of interaction with the other players is limited, especially as elimination of the lowest-scoring player happens at timed intervals. The Retro and Neo modes do provide competent single-player action, although we'd have liked some display options for the Retro mode. Ultimately, it's fun enough but the whole package feels a little bit too thin given the asking price.

NICK THORPE

» Score **62%**



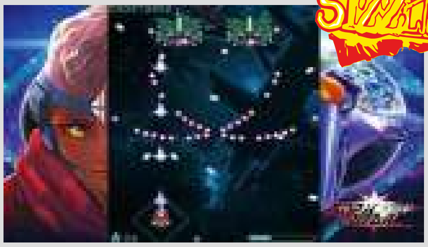
Garbage Pail Kids: Mad Mike & The Quest For Stale Gum

» System: Switch (tested), NES, PC, PS4, Xbox One
» Buy it from: Online, iam8bit.com
» Buy it for: £8.99, $79.99 NES physical

This is positioned as a "lost NES game" based on the Eighties trading-card franchise, and that's exactly what it feels like. Taking control of a squad of four characters with differing abilities, you need to acquire six items spread across time to make a stale gum machine. The levels are perhaps a little too long at times and the enemies a tad repetitive, but the platforming is solid and trading cards for better power-ups is a clever use of the licence. It's a reasonable throwback, but you may find it overly formulaic if you play NES games regularly.

NICK THORPE

» Score **70%**



Sophstar

» System: PS5 (tested) PC, PS4, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S **» Buy it from:** Online
» Buy it for: £7.99+, €24.99+ physical

If you like *Toaplan*-styled shmups you should definitely grab *Sophstar*, which is getting a physical release courtesy of Red Art Games. Coded by Banana Bytes, it's a tremendous shooter that is clearly inspired by the past, but still has plenty of neat ideas of its own. Content is *Sophstar*'s greatest strength. There are nine ships to discover, all with their own strengths and weaknesses, an interesting teleport mechanic and a neat scoring system that sees you grabbing cubes before they shrink in size. Other highlights include Timed Challenge, score attack and tutorial options and the mission-based Cadet School. A great shmup that you don't want to miss.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **92%**

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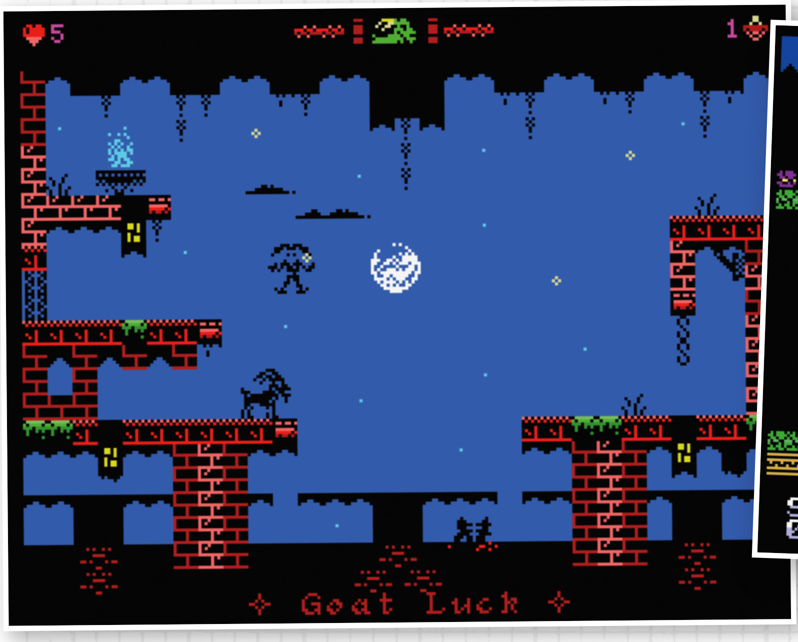
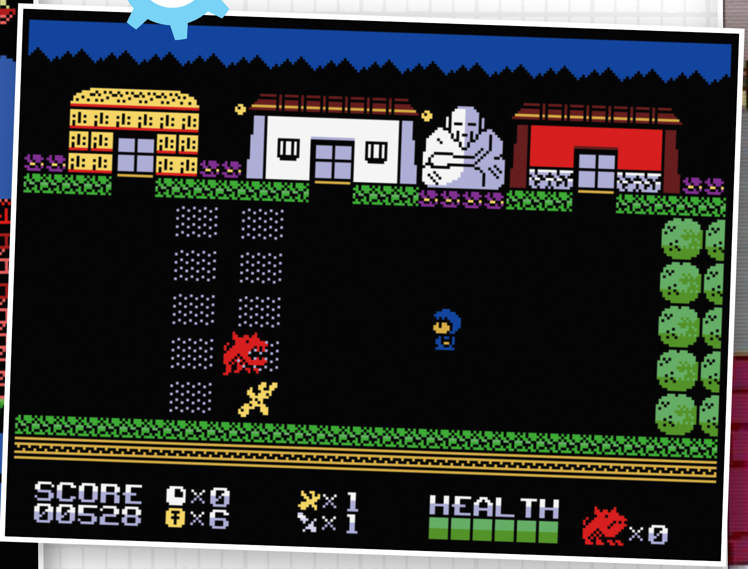
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>





<!--- [MSX] EARN COINS TO BUY DAGGERS AND PLANT GINGER IN MY SACRED PLACE. --->

<INTRO> THERE ARE SO MANY GREAT THINGS HAPPENING, INCLUDING THE MSXDEV 2022 COMPETITION. AND WITH LIMITED SPACE ON THE PAGE, I WANT TO BRING YOU MORE – INCLUDING DIRECT LINKS, MORE INTERVIEW ANSWERS, AND MORE DETAIL. SO YOU CAN NOW VISIT BIT.LY/HOMEBREWEXTRAS TO DISCOVER MORE FOR EACH ISSUE ONCE PUBLISHED, SUCH AS A LINK TO RICHARD CHANDLER'S EXCELLENT AQUALITE EMULATOR (AQUARIUS.JE/AQUALITE) I USED FOR HELP WITH THE AQUARIUS FEATURE IN ISSUE 238. </INTRO>

SCORE
001
LIVES
3
STAGE
01
ORDER
JAIL

EXIT
SCORE:000090
:1
:0
LEVEL:01

<MAIN HEADER>

MAGNIFICENT MSX

<INTRO> THE MSXDEV COMPETITION HAS BEEN RUNNING SINCE 2005, AND THIS YEAR SAW AN AMAZING 32 VARIED AND PLAYABLE ENTRIES </INTRO>

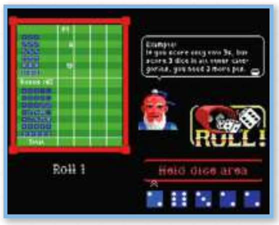
<BODY> **Organisers Roman and John have been pleased with the 2022 competition.** "In 2015, when it was time for Viejo_Archivero and Robsy to pass on the torch, it was Konamito and me who were approached by them to follow them up," Johns says. "MSXdev21 was my first edition, and it was a good one," Roman adds. "John has seven editions under his belt, I have two. I'm already planning MSXdev 2023!" Prize money is donated, and prizes are added to the 'loot box', with winners selecting their favourite prize item. "The competition is non-commercial, for MSX lovers, by MSX lovers," explains Roman.

This year's jury includes Tadahiro Nitta, a composer from the Japanese firm Micro Cabin, graphic artist Tony Gálvez and developer Micha Mulder (who entered *PAC01* and *Raven* in 2021). The theme was Freestyle, as Roman explains. "It can be a real showcase of what the MSX system can truly do. Why limit yourself to MSX1 machines?"

Robosoft's Marco Blom, the creator of RoboSID, is also a C64 fan and converted two games. "The biggest challenge for *Shadow Switcher* was mapping the levels on a smaller resolution (320 versus 256 pixels wide), and mimicking the AI of the robots, based on behaviour in the original," he says. "For *Randoom*, I tried to stay as close as possible to the original, however, both games were recreated without having source code." Would he compete again? "I think joining another MSXdev is pretty sure. For other machines, I think the C64 would be the most likely option." Marco develops in Visual Studio Code together with the Glass Z80 assembler and SDCC for C code, before testing on real hardware.

"During the COVID lockdown, I discovered that there was a large community that kept the essence of 8-bits alive," says Roolando (Angel Colaso), who has Spectrum and MSX games under his belt. "I almost had to remake *Bufonada* from scratch to incorporate hardware sprites, more fluid movements, more colours, new sound effects… I have suffered the horrible ports that were made from ZX Spectrum

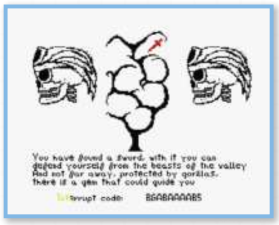
FIRM FAVOURITES



DICED – TOURNAMENT

Mi-Chi & Def Danny

<This has a superb Wild West theme, multiple tunes to buy and a deep tutorial to prepare you for 17 massive tournaments of a classic dice game./>



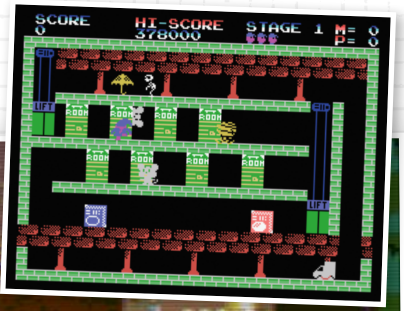
SACRED VALLEY

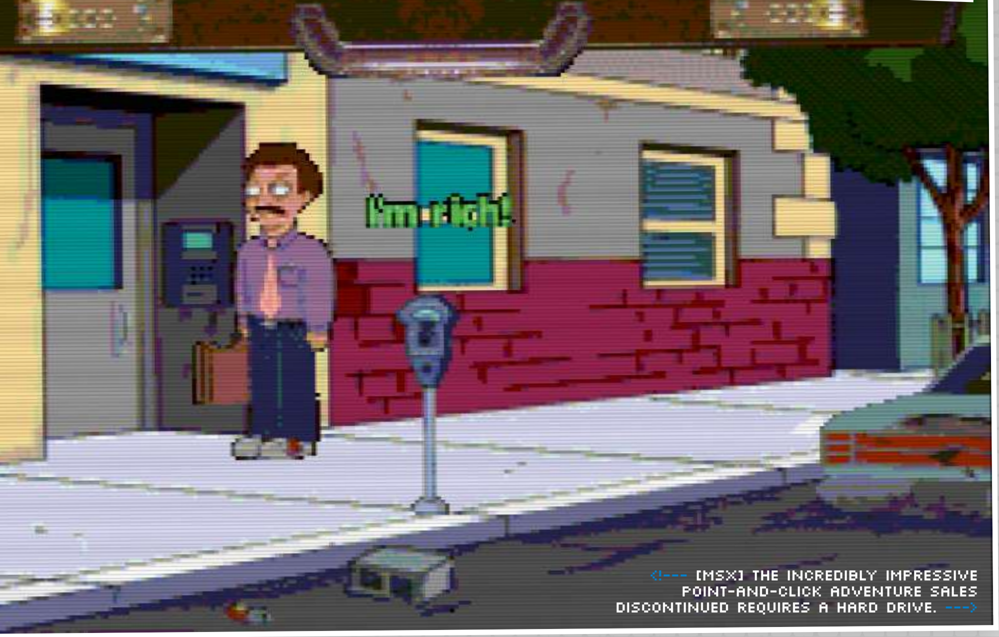
Visualedu & Bitcaffe

<Influenced by South America and with great intermission art, explore the valley day and night to find sacred objects, with a built-in password system./>

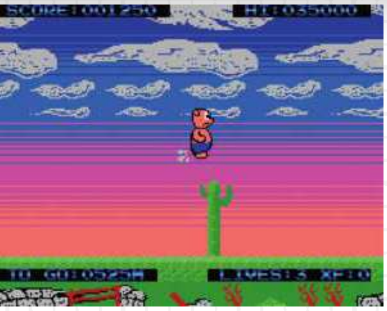
NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**





<!--- [MSX] THE INCREDIBLY IMPRESSIVE POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE SALES DISCONTINUED REQUIRES A HARD DRIVE. --->

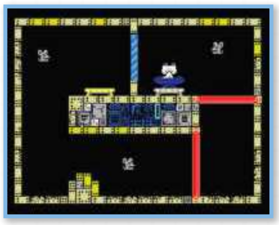


<!--- [MSX] SHADOW OF THE PIG MIXED THE CHROME OFFLINE GAME WITH SHADOW OF THE BEAST-STYLE PARALLAX. --->

to MSX (at least in Spain)." Roolando uses the MSX Suite created by JLTursan for MPAGD and encourages others to get involved in the competition.

"The MSX scene is one that I really enjoy being a part of," says Roman. "Amazing people with amazing skills for 8-bit programming can be found all over the world; a lot of them gather at the MSX Resource Center (msx.org)." John echoes Roman's thoughts, "The MSX community is very open and helpful, and the developers are no exception. On top of that, they are extremely skilled, creative, and motivated. Each edition of MSXdev, I am very impressed by several entries." You will be too if you check them and the results out at msxdev.org </BODY>

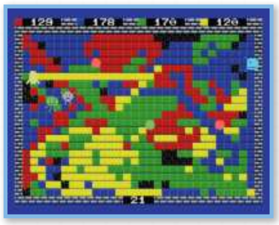
<INTRO> OUR PICK OF THE BEST COMPETITION ENTRIES </INTRO>



SPACECAT

Platty Soft

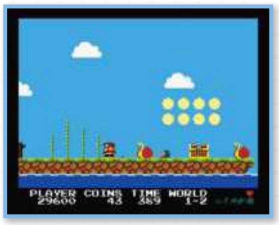
< With echoes of the classic *Space Taxi* and *Thrust*, guide the SpaceCat through increasingly tricky level layouts to capture all the space mice. />



MUHONMOURN

hoge1e3

< Based on the Japanese developer's web games, this MSX exclusive sees up to four players trying to colour in the most squares to win. />



LILLY'S SAGA - THE STONES OF EVERGREEN

Fabulous8bit

< This outstanding Mega ROM harks back to *Super Mario Bros*. Physical cartridges will be available from lillyssaga.com />

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, DIVIDED BY FORMAT FOR YOU </INTRO>

< **Acorn:** 0xC0DE's *Electrobots – Going Underground* for Electron, BBC Model B and Master is available at bit.ly/electrobots2 />

< **Atari 2600**: Arlasoft released *Top & Tom* (based on chsxf.itch.io/top-and-tom) and *Stepz* (inspired by a MEGA65 title). *Stepz* is dedicated to Aurora Richmond, with donations welcome to Great Ormond Street Hospital (gosh.org). Visit arlagames.itch.io for more info. />

< **C64:** ICON64 are testing *Terrestrial* (inspired by *Beach-Head* and *Raid Over Moscow*) for a Psytronik release, while *Impossible Mission III* work continues. Psytronik also released Alf Yngve's *Captain Ishtar* digitally – it can be found at psytronik.itch.io />

< **Master System:** Under4MHz is working on a *Wolfenstein* conversion (above). There's a development thread at bit.ly/wolfenstein-sms Mananuk has converted their MSX title *Black Sea*. More at bit.ly/blacksea-sms />

< **PICO-8:** Paul Hammond's latest is *Berzerk*, with added power-ups and great speech synthesis courtesy of Bikibird; he is now converting *Beamrider*. Visit pahammond.itch.io/berzerk />

< **PLUS/4:** C64Mark has converted the challenging platform game *Hercules* to C16 and Plus/4, adding heroine Yolanda and new stages. It's at c64mark.itch.io/hercules />

< **Songbird Productions:** Songbird has reprinted cult Nuon title *Freefall 3050 AD* and produced the limited edition *Microvaders* preview Lynx cartridge (RG232), with the beta download available in November.
Head to songbird-productions.com />

< **Various:** *Tenebra 2* from Haplo is coming to C64 and Plus/4. More at h4plo.itch.io/tenebra-2 />

< **ZX Spectrum:** Check out the brilliant *Gherbert Groundhog In Save The Date* from Putty CAD and PsychicParrot at bit.ly/ghebert1 or enjoy Zosya's *Don Quixote* at bit.ly/donquixote16k and Ariel Endaraues' *Yokai Monk* at endaraues.itch.io/yokai-monk />

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

CHAMPION CODER

FABRIZIO CARUSO

<INTRO> FABRIZO'S CROSS-LIB IS A GAME DEV TOOL FOR HUNDREDS OF VINTAGE COMPUTERS AND CONSOLES </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: ITALY WEBSITE: BIT.LY/CROSSLIB FORMAT: VARIOUS
RECENTLY GAME: CROSS HORDE (VARIOUS) WORKING ON: CROSS-LIB (VARIOUS) />

WHAT INSPIRED CROSS-LIB?

<I was initially inspired by the CC65 and Z88DK 8-bit cross-development dev kits as they have (close to) ANSI-compliant C compilers and libraries that allow you to code game graphics in a hardware-agnostic way for most of their own targets. I decided to implement the support for *all* 8-bit targets for which there is a C compiler (currently about 200) and implement a hardware abstraction layer across all dev kits so that you can write the game code in C with Cross-Lib APIs *only once* and then use Cross-Lib scripts to build it for 200 different targets by using multiple dev kits for different architectures. With Cross-Lib, you code for a sort of virtual vintage computer or console. />

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE GAME TO DEVELOP?

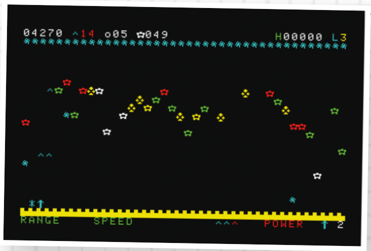
<*Cross Horde* is a zombie shoot-'em-up with lots of power-ups and little secrets, which has been a lot of fun to code and play. *Cross Snake* is a mix of the arcade game *Nibbler* and the Nokia mobile phone game *Snake*, with many more game elements, 33 different levels and lots of secrets to discover. />

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU ADD?

<Cross-Lib is being extended with improved targets (BBC Micro, Atari 7800, TRS-80 MC-10), new targets (TRS-80 CoCo 3), support for more cross-compilers (LLVM-MOS for the MOS6502, PCC-TMS9995 for the TMS9900 and TMS9995), improved build and assets tools, improved APIs (less constrained graphics on capable targets) and improved native builds. By the way, Cross-Lib can be used to build PC games that run natively on a modern PC, currently limited to the ASCII terminal. />

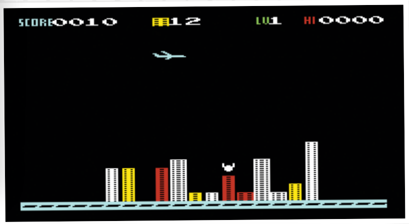
DO YOU HAVE MORE IDEAS FOR CROSS-LIB GAMES?

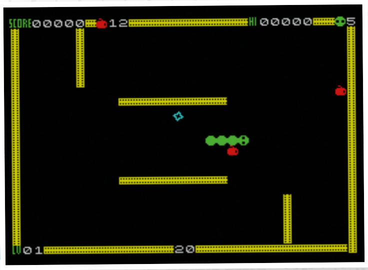
<Maybe too many. I have already written a *Space Invaders* interactive demo and I am working on a demo version of the Google Chrome *T-Rex* offline game. I am aware of at least one person experimenting with Cross-Lib. />

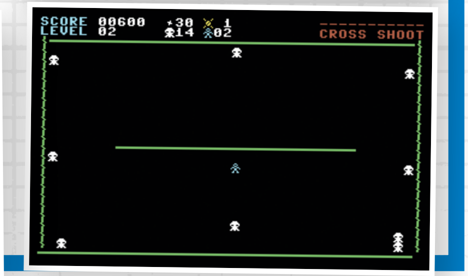

04270 ^14 o05 ✩049
H00000 L3
RANGE
SPEED
POWER

<!--- [AQUARIUS] MENTIONED IN RG238, THIS CROSS HORDE UPDATE FOR MATTEL AQUARIUS ADDED REDEFINED GRAPHICS. --->

<!--- [VIC-20] CLEAR THE BUILDINGS SO YOU CAN LAND IN CROSS BOMBER. --->


SCORE0010
12
LV1
HI0000


SCORE00000
12
HI 00000
5
01
20


SCORE 00600
LEVEL 02
30 1
14 02
CROSS SHOOT

DATA BURST

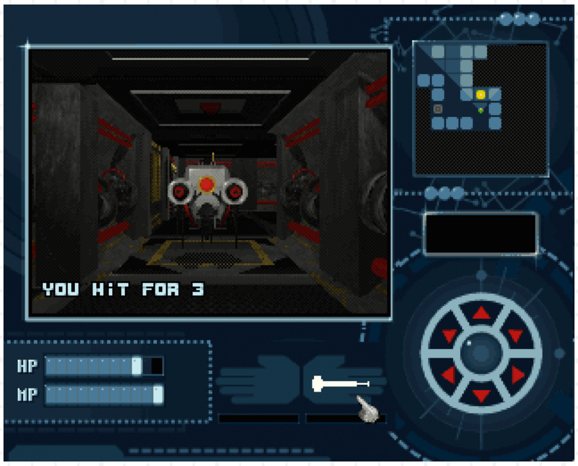
BLACK DAWN TECHNOMAGE

<INFO BY: Z-SOFT (SHAUN WATTERS, TIM GILBERT, MIKE RICHMOND) FORMAT: AMIGA (AGA MACHINES ONLY)
PRICE: £42.50 (LIMITED EDITION BOX) VISIT: BIT.LY/BDTECHNO />

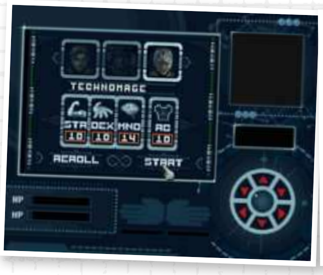
<BODY> **This is the latest in the *Black Dawn* series, taking the form of a first-person dungeon crawler in the mould of *Dungeon Master*.** The hero of the last game, Brenn, has been driven mad by the Black Dawn and built his personal fortress on a small moon. Brenn increased the size of his fortress and his robot protectors started to kill the locals. You have been hired to infiltrate the vast base and take out Brenn. You start by choosing one of three classes – Fighter, Sniper and Technomage.

As you explore, you can read monitors for clues, hit switches to change the level layout and find key cards to unlock doors. Combat can be ranged with guns or up close with melee weapons; the Technomage can equip a digital tablet and select runes to cast magic spells. The dark and moody graphics and excellent music create a fantastic sci-fi atmosphere. The icon control for movement and selecting objects can sometimes be a little fiddly, but there is a huge world to explore. The limited-edition box set features glossy artwork by industry veteran Simon Phipps, a mouse mat, beer mat, logo sticker and manual – plus three floppy disks. Highly recommended for Amiga veterans and sci-fi fans. </BODY>

SCORE: 85%


YOU HIT FOR 3
HP
MP

<!--- [AMIGA AGA] CHARACTER CREATION GIVES YOU THREE DIFFERENT CLASSES AND THE ABILITY TO REROLL THEIR STATS. --->

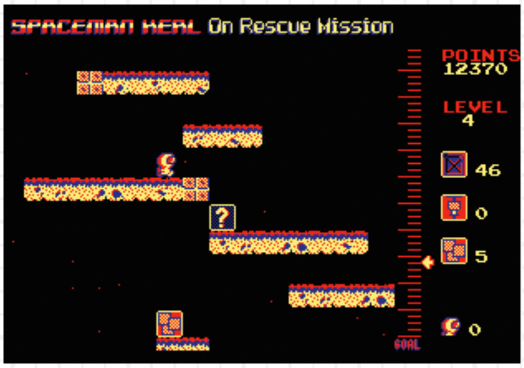

TECHNOMAGE
STR DEX MND AG
10 10 14 10
REROLL
START

BLACK DAWN
TECHNOMAGE

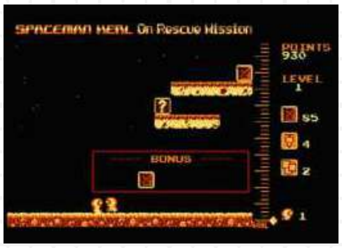
NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT



SPACEMAN KERL On Rescue Mission
POINTS
12370
LEVEL
4
46
0
5
0
GOAL



SPACEMAN KERL On Rescue Mission
POINTS
930
LEVEL
1
BONUS

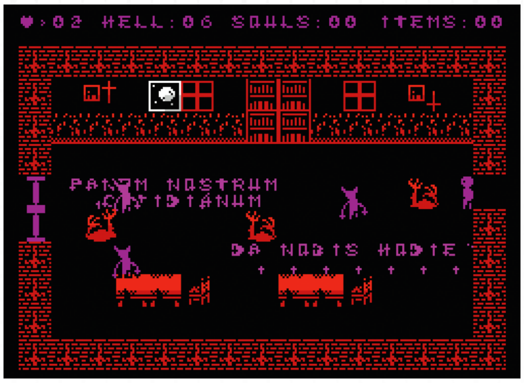
8BP
SPACEMAN KERL
ON RESCUE MISSION

SPACEMAN KERL

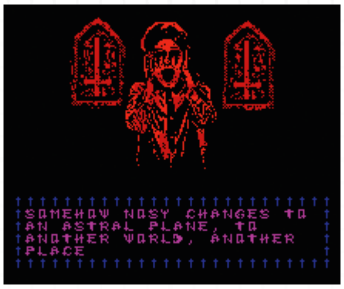
<INFO BY: FITOSOFT FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC
PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD)
VISIT: FITOSOFT.ITCH.IO/SPACEMAN-KERL />

<BODY> **Based on the Spectrum game *Paracaidista Kerl* by Azimov, you control Kerl as he descends to the planet's surface to rescue his friends.** Kerl's jetpack has limited fuel to slow his descent, and he can lay slabs (by pressing Up) to extend platforms or drill (by pressing Down) to break through platforms. To collect extra drills, slabs, fuel and bonus points (? blocks), Kerl must fall onto the icon directly; he cannot pick them up by moving left or right. Cute graphics and a changing palette portray the action well, and a nice optional tune plays. The mixture of planning and random level generation makes a fun little game that will draw you back for one more go. </BODY>

SCORE: **81%**

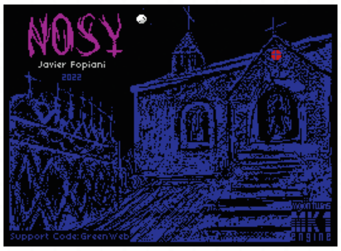


02 HELL:06 SOULS:00 ITEMS:00



SOMEHOW NOSY CHANGES TO AN ASTRAL PLANE, TO ANOTHER WORLD, ANOTHER PLACE

<!--- [SPECTRUM +3] COMIC-BOOK-STYLE INTERMISSIONS AND SAMPLED SCREAMS CREATE A SUPERB ATMOSPHERE. --->



NOSY
Javier Fopiani
2022
Support Code: GreenWeb
MK1 engine

NOSY

<INFO BY: JAVIER FOPIANI FORMAT: 128K SPECTRUM (+2A OR +3 RECOMMENDED) PRICE: €2 OR MORE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) VISIT: JAVIERFOPIANI.ITCH.IO/NOSY />

<BODY> **Nosy is trapped in the orphanage with evil spirits and must find holy relics to free the trapped orphans from the astral plane.** This spooky game has been updated with digitised voices and more for 128K Spectrums. Accompanying the game you get the soundtrack, a 'video comic' and more. The atmosphere is great throughout, but the gameplay is very tricky; reading the 'spoiler' will help you pick the right objects needed at certain points in the game. Full marks for the presentation and it's enjoyable if you love horror games. </BODY>

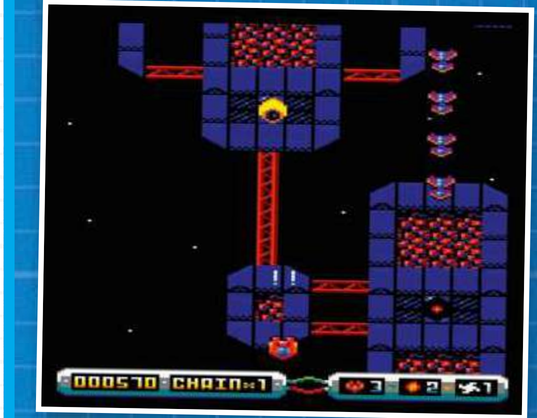
SCORE: **74%**

PROCESSING

<INTRO> THE LATEST ON AMSTRAD CPC TITLE HYPERDRIVE AND THE PROMISING ATARI STE GAME SPACEZOT </INTRO>

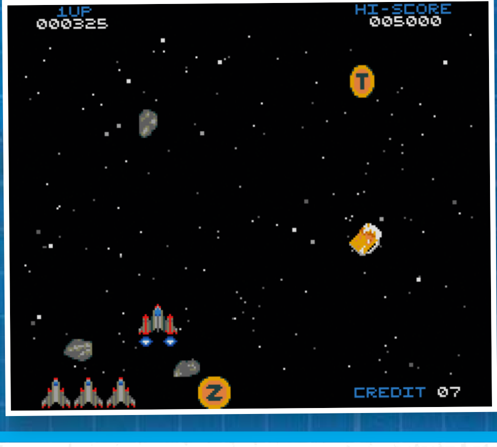
<BODY> **Juan Martinez has continued developing the vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up *Hyperdrive* since issue 234's interview.** "I have around 70% done, so there should be only another 70% left," Juan says. "It will have five stages, with different enemies, music and final bosses, and the game will be on cartridge image (CPC+ and Dandanator) for any CPC model, the GX4000 and most emulators."

SpaceZot started as a minigame in DrFloyd's Atari ST RPG *Cosmos Chronicles*. "With PAPY CPC and DMA-SC, we are working on another project, *Catacombs*, a roguelike for Atari STE," Eric Damain (Shaoth) explains. "It's a bigger project that takes more time. *SpaceZot* was started during a slow period on *Catacombs*. It was very well-received during presentations at different conventions. So we decided to go ahead and make it into a stand-alone game. PAPY CPC takes care of all the graphics and grumbles when I add new stuff. DMA-SC wrote the music, and new music is planned for the new levels." </BODY>



000570
CHAIN:1
3
2
1

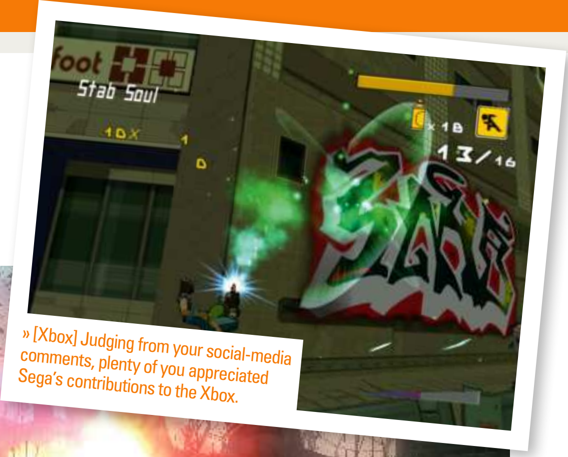
<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] AT THE TIME OF WRITING, JUAN HAS JUST FINISHED CODING STAGE 4'S BOSS FOR HYPERDRIVE. --->



1UP
000325
HI-SCORE
005000
T
Z
CREDIT 07

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES



» [Xbox] Judging from your social-media comments, plenty of you appreciated Sega's contributions to the Xbox.

XBOX MEMORIES

We reminisce about Bill's big box

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Twenty years ago, the Xbox was about to enter its first European holiday season after a tumultuous launch. With that in mind, we decided to get together and share our memories of the machine that launched Microsoft's ambitions in the home-console scene.

NICK

What did you think of Microsoft's chances in the console market, when you first heard about the Xbox?

DARRAN

I think I was initially sceptical because I'd always considered it to be PC-focussed. The more I read, the more I began to realise Microsoft was throwing everything it could to ensure it would be a success.

TIM

It was a bold step to enter the market considering the previous focus on PCs, so I was a bit sceptical… although it seems to have paid off now though.

DARRAN

Yeah, you could certainly argue Microsoft has been playing the long game. Unless of course you're a Nintendo or PlayStation owner…

» [Xbox] *Fable* wasn't quite what Peter Molyneux promised, but it was still an excellent game.

NICK

To be honest, I didn't expect the Xbox to do well at first. Most Japanese developers seemed hesitant and the initial screenshots looked too good to be true. The demo pod with *Fuzion Frenzy* in Tesco didn't help matters. Did you guys have better first impressions?

TIM

Heh, the first time I played one was at some big roadside service station while on the way to my interview for *Cube*. I played a bit of *Project Gotham Racing* and it looked amazing. (Also I got the job, yaaaay!)

DARRAN

Yup, playing *Project Gotham Racing* and *Dead Or Alive 3* on a demo booth in Southampton's Virgin store is what convinced me. They both looked incredible and were fantastic fun to play and that's when I realised I needed to own Microsoft's new console. In fact, it's the system that got me back into gaming after I sold virtually my entire collection a year earlier.

NICK

Yeah, *Dead Or Alive 3* and *Jet Set Radio Future* were the games that convinced me that the console was as powerful as the hype suggested. What about *Halo* though?

DARRAN

Halo was a revelation. Playing the campaign mode co-operatively, having the 16-player matches which I've mentioned in the past. There was nothing else like it on any system. It was a true killer app as the kids like to say today.

TIM

It did look nice, but I didn't have an Xbox back then. I've played it since then and it's not aged brilliantly, with it lacking the wow-factor you'd get from playing it in the Noughties.

DARRAN

But the bark, Tim. LOOK AT THE BARK! LOOK AT THE AWESOME GRASS!

TIM

GAMES WILL NEVER LOOK BETTER THAN THIS!

DARRAN

That's certainly how I felt. In fact I loved the Xbox so much that I found a way to own virtually every launch game for it. I even got the two free games and pad when they were doing the refund offer. What games ultimately sold the system to you two?

TIM

Fable actually. A housemate who worked for *XBM* asked if I'd like to borrow it while he was away on a press trip. So I played *Fable*

» [Xbox] Do you think the original *Halo* still holds up as a great game?

to death. And was kind of sad when he came home and took the Xbox back. Tried a bit of *Ninja Gaiden* as well, but damn it's a difficult game.

NICK

I got mine in 2004, it was the *Sega GT 2002* and *Jet Set Radio Future* bundle on a cheap deal. *Ninja Gaiden* was already out and I really wanted that, and *OutRun 2* had not long been announced as an exclusive.

DARRAN

Now you've reminded me of when *games™* knocked my *OutRun 2* score down to 8/10. The wounds never heal. *Ninja Gaiden* felt superb at the time.

NICK

Team Ninja really seemed to have mastered the Xbox hardware from day one – did any other developers stand out in the same way?

DARRAN

I must admit I quite liked how Sega threw itself into Microsoft's console. Most of its best games from the era seemed to end up on the Xbox and if it wasn't making gems like *Gunvalkyrie* and *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, it was publishing really interesting stuff like *Otogi*.

NICK

Yeah, Sega also got behind Xbox Live in a pretty big way. Was online gaming much of a factor when you decided to get an Xbox?

TIM

My first experience with online gaming was playing *Burnout 3*. It was so intense, especially on the last corner of a race, and playing against other people – strangers and some friends from work. Still didn't buy one though, they were expensive.

DARRAN

I remember being invited into the early beta and getting absolutely excited with the headset. I remember Mel saying, "Why are you getting so excited about wearing a headset? You wear one at work." To which I replied, "This one lets me kill people online." I made a lot of lifelong friends on Xbox Live. It was just a brilliant introduction to online gaming for me as I found PCs a real hassle.

NICK

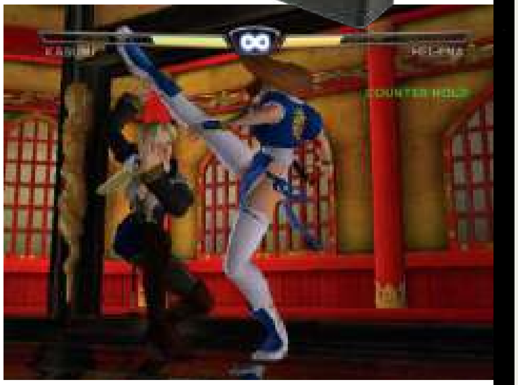
I wasn't sure about the subscription fee at first, but I got a starter kit for Christmas and that was me sorted. Speaking of money, one last thing: why do we think the Xbox is so cheap to collect for these days?

TIM

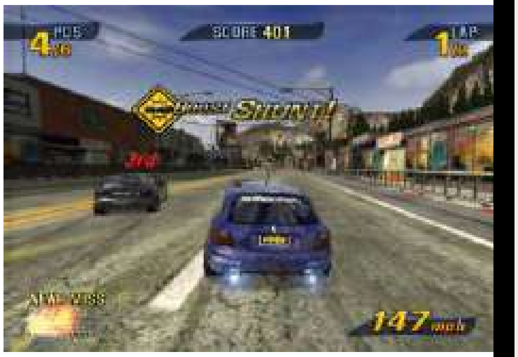
Because a lot of the games are available digitally? I've got *Crimson Skies* on my Xbox One, flipping love that game.

DARRAN

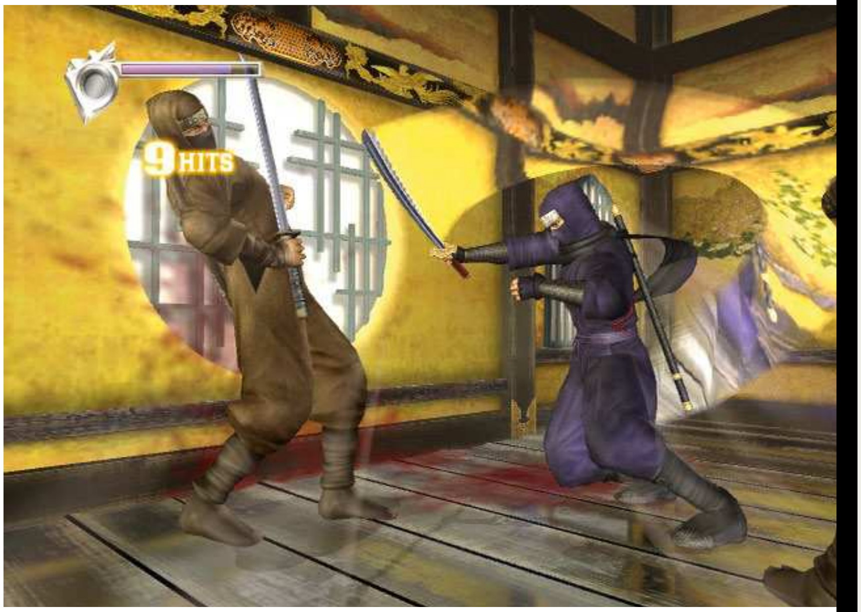
That's a good point, Tim. I think piracy could be an issue (load your modded hard drive with games), but it's most likely that it's just not that desirable to collect for next to the GameCube and PS2. Still, more cheap games for me! *



» [Xbox] When Nick first saw screenshots of *Dead Or Alive 3*, he was convinced they were mock-ups.



» [Xbox] If online gaming was important to you, the Xbox was easily the best choice of its generation.



» [Xbox] With a developer like Team Ninja, the power advantage of the Xbox was obvious.

THE BEST OF THE BOX

What are your favourite Xbox memories?

jeff

Ripping CDs to the hard drive and driving around to your own custom soundtrack felt magical at the time.

Andy O'Flaherty

Even though I'd dabbled in online with the Dreamcast on dial-up, playing *Halo 2* online with broadband was a complete game-changer for consoles, and a glimpse into what was coming in the future…

worldofcraig

Seeing *Soulcalibur 2* running on the Xbox side by side with the PS2 version is what convinced me to get an Xbox. It just looked so much smoother and nicer. Once I bought one I had fond memories of buying *KOTOR* and playing that to completion.

Verden Meldrum

Getting a load of 'the lads' around, each bringing a TV and an Xbox and having epic LAN nights. *Midtown Madness*, *Halo*, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* and quite a few others.

Tim Bradshaw

Whilst acknowledging that being released late in the gen gave it a tech advantage, there has never been another console that has been so far ahead of the competition in power terms. I was playing games with scope only achievable on PC for the first time. *Halo*, *KOTOR* – sensational.

Harley Palmer

Steel Battalion was and still is a masterpiece. The controller has yet to be rivalled for mech combat. The delete save feature for character death was ambitious in their pursuit of absolute realism.

Imran Yusuf

The fact that focus group results favoured that enormous controller, which looked like it had crashed in Roswell 1947.

Phil Rowland

Burnout Revenge on Xbox Live was off-the-scale good. It actually felt naughty going that fast so recklessly!

Cthulhu Mythos Music

Playing *Thief: Deadly Shadows* and marvelling at the dynamic shadows and physics of knocking over objects. I hadn't experienced something like that until the Xbox.

Dave Dragert

Ninja Gaiden, nobody could squeeze power out of the Xbox like Tomonobu Itagaki!

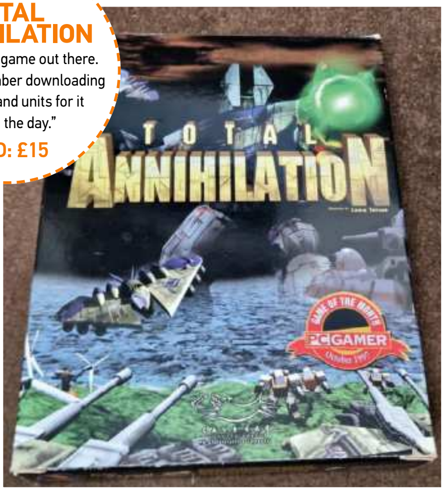
COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SILENT HILL

"The best find that I've come across in a charity shop. I nearly fainted when I found it."

PAID: 50P



TOTAL ANNIHILATION

"The best RTS game out there. I vividly remember downloading new maps and units for it back in the day."

PAID: £15

A CHARITY-BASED COLLECTION

Our latest collector enjoys scouring charity shops for bargains

BIO

NAME:
Jamie Depledge

LOCATION:
South West (originally Yorkshire)

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
Hopefully more than I paid for it

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Dreamcast

FAVOURITE GAME:
Dark Chronicle

YOUTUBE:
BestNerdLife

Jamie Depledge is relatively new on the collecting scene, having been inspired by the games he enjoyed as a child and social media. "Although I've been a gamer from an early age, I only started properly building my collection around 2019," he tells us. I'd watched people grow their own collections through YouTube and social media, and I finally decided to join them."

As a result Jamie's collecting has grown alongside his Youtube channel (BestNerdLife). He regularly heads to charity shops and shares his finds online, from the good hauls to the disappointing ones. "It has helped that I've started from scratch, and I'm pretty open to what I collect," he admits. "Charity shop hunting helped kick-start my collection."

While he does like to look out for bargains he doesn't look to profit off his hobby, so rarely buys items to flip. "I'm not really in it to flip them for cash money," he says. "I have on occasion traded a game in for credit if it was a particularly good deal, but if I find a duplicate then I usually leave it for someone else."

Although Jamie's collection is vast and covers all eras he does have an affinity for Sony's various consoles, explaining that the original PlayStation was his main console growing up. "It's the one I have the most nostalgic connection to, and it seems to be the one retro console I find a lot of games for out in the wild," he continues.

Jamie does say that choosing to focus on charity shop collecting has meant he collects a wide variety of things. "I collect for pretty much any system," he admits. "I have cartridges, floppy disks, cassettes, CDs, you name it. That's one of the best things about heading into charity shops. You never know what you might find."

Despite his eclectic choices, Jamie did mention that he has no interest in Sony's PlayStation 3. It's not that he doesn't like the system, he simply skipped it in order to focus on Microsoft's Xbox 360 instead. His focus on looking for games in charity shops doesn't affect his budgeting either. "I don't really have a monthly budget," he explains. "Instead, I just tend to limit the amount of money I pay for each item. If a game is anything above a couple of quid in a charity shop, I leave it. Just play it by ear. There are exceptions of course. The thing that is making me limit myself these days is space."

He doesn't currently have any specific focus for his collection, but when pressed, he did mention he liked the idea of building up his Dreamcast collection, as it's one system he "missed out on playing growing up". Otherwise Jamie is happy to simply collect what he finds.

He does have the following useful information to share though, for anyone that is planning to build their vintage videogame collection in a similar way. "As with many things, patience is key, especially with charity shop hunting," he says. "If you expect to walk into your first shop and find the mother lode, then you will be disappointed. Also, don't be afraid to rummage. The amount of original PlayStation games I've found simply by flipping through the CD section is obscene." *

MUPPET MONSTER ADVENTURE

"Awesomely nostalgic collect-a-thon featuring the Muppets. A late-night eBay purchase."

PAID: £12

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CAMELS

"I chose this purely for the daft name. Love it. Bought as a bundle of 150+ Commodore 64 cassettes."

PAID: AROUND 30P

BLACKSAD: UNDER THE SKIN

"I'm a massive fan of the *Blacksad* comic series, and was very happy to pick this limited edition up for the price I did brand-new."

PRICE: £3.98

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

FINAL FANTASY LEGEND III

■ "A childhood favourite. I don't usually pay so much for a single game, but this was the exception."

PAID: £100

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

ATARI 2600

This iconic system is Atari through and through. Prices obviously vary based on contents and condition, but an unboxed system with games starts at **£45.**

ROBOCOP

Sadly, you can't buy the Spectrum version of *RoboCop* for a dollar. The tape version ranges from **£6** to **£35,** while the disk version can hit **£20.**

DISCWORLD

Complete boxed editions of the PC game are getting quite pricey and can top out at **£60** if they are in perfect condition. Both the Saturn and PlayStation versions tend to range in price from **£35** to **£65.**

RAYFORCE

The Saturn version of Taito's shmup is getting pricey. PAL and US copies (look for *Galactic Attack*) can hit **£110** and **£140,** respectively. The Japanese version (known as *Layer Section*) can reach **£55.**

GEARS OF WAR

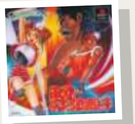
Want to know where the adventures of Marcus Fenix began? You can find out by spending **£5** on the Xbox 360 version, which is quite the bargain.

CYBERNOID II: THE REVENGE

None of the 8-bit versions of Raffaele Cecco's game should cost more than **£20** and we've seen the Spectrum version regularly hit **£8.**

BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN

The first game in the *Legacy Of Kain* series is rising in price, with the PAL PlayStation edition reaching highs of **£50.** Complete boxed copies of the PC game can sell for even higher amounts.



NEKKETSU OYAKO

If you fancy this Japanese exclusive you have two options – the PlayStation version ranges from **£55** to **£92,** while the Saturn edition ranges from **£110** to **£190.**

CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE

The cheapest way to experience this is digitally, via Konami's recent compilation. If you want the real deal complete copies sell for **£214.** Yikes!

TRAILBLAZER

Fancy reliving Nick's experience of *Trailblazer* on the Commodore 64? You'll be pleased to know prices rarely top **£20.**

HOW MUCH?!

BATTLESPHERE GOLD

A rare, complete version of *BattleSphere Gold* recently did well for its owner as it sold for a whopping 2,200 Australian dollars or **£1,221.** It was a Buy It Now listing as well, so a collector clearly wanted to own it.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

FAN FARE

Nick remembers his years as an amateur writer

A short while ago, I was fortunate enough to watch *Super Play*'s erstwhile anime expert Helen McCarthy delivering a talk about UK anime fanzines in the pre-broadband era. It was a fascinating look at a history that is seldom discussed and barely preserved, and it even touched on some gaming works such as Onn Lee's *Electric Brain*. One particular thing that stuck out to me during the talk was the comment that print fanzines fell by the wayside due to the relative ease of publishing online, as I couldn't help but reflect on my own path as a writer, going from online fan sites to a professional print publication.

That story starts about two decades ago, following a miserable secondary-school experience. I was pretty directionless and the only thing that really appealed to me was writing about games. Unfortunately, being a 16-year-old with only GCSEs to my name meant that I was finding it hard to get *any* job – I actually lost my first temp job on the second day, when the manager realised how old I was. The fact that I was essentially unemployable wasn't going to stop me living my dream though, as I had boundless enthusiasm for the Dreamcast and a growing sense of frustration that mainstream magazines weren't covering brilliant import games like *Ikaruga*. So, armed with some free web space and a Dot TK domain name, I started my own site.

What I'd love to tell you is that it was brilliant, but that would be a lie. To say I was yet to fully develop as a writer would be too kind – reading some old reviews, it is painfully obvious that I was crap. I also got into some spats I'd rather forget, and was a tiresome self-promoter. But the act of writing regularly was invaluable practice and by the time *Border Down* came out, I had one of the very few English language reviews of the game online and was just about good enough for people to take notice. Import coverage meant that I was able to sustain a small audience over the next few years, and I even had some contributors, one of whom went on to have a writing career of their own.

Real life got in the way when I started university, but I couldn't stop writing for long. I was invited to contribute to the arcade news site Arcade Heroes in early 2008 after spending some time as a regular forum poster, and we were soon invited to the launch event for *Sega Rally 3*. I represented the site and ended up being the only press attendee in a room full of developers and trade types, so we had the only coverage online, meaning that all the big sites linked to us. I'd gone in expecting to feel like a fraud in a room full of *proper* games journalists but ended up feeling like a proper one myself, and the temporary traffic spike gave us a permanent increase in readership. It was an exciting time to cover the arcade scene with games like that and *Street Fighter IV* coming out, and I wrote for the site on and off for about five years.

My next big opportunity as a fan writer genuinely started with a message from the admin of Sonic Retro, reading "CHOSEN ONE, I HAVE A GRAND QUEST". My task was to interview Yuji Naka and Takashi Iizuka, who were going to be at Summer Of Sonic to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the series. It took me 0.3 seconds to accept it. It actually didn't go brilliantly, as scheduling issues meant that I only got to ask them two questions each – and even then, only because Naka intervened to ensure that I got the same number of questions as the other people in the interview. But it went well enough that I was asked to cover subsequent events, giving me the opportunity to interview the likes of Jun Senoue, Steve Lycett and Kazuyuki Hoshino.

All of that, and a short-lived retro gaming blog I'd started, came to an end in 2013 when I became **Retro Gamer**'s staff writer. All those years of practice had let me turn my hobby into my job, which felt totally surreal, but I knew that if I could happily write about games for a decade without getting paid a penny, it was probably the right career move. *

> "My task was to interview Yuji Naka and Takashi Iizuka"
>
> **NICK THORPE**

TOP TIPS

Things that helped me make my fan work stand out

JUST PUBLISH
Everybody starts off bad, so don't wait to get good. If you read a lot and write regularly, you'll get better along the way.

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT
Few other people were covering Dreamcast and arcade games, which meant that we had a unique selling point in both cases.

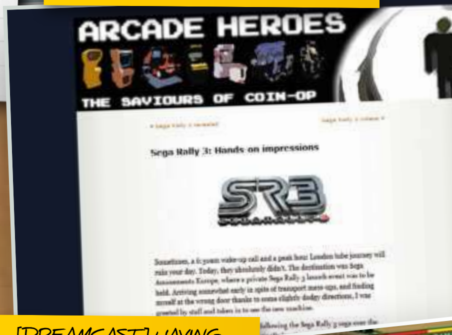
BUILD AN AUDIENCE
Twitter is good for this. Don't be afraid to show off your work, but don't treat everything as a promotional opportunity.

BE AUTHENTIC
Write in the style that comes naturally to you, it's easier. Also, sometimes your spicy hot-take will generate discussion.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS
If you no longer have the time or passion for what you're doing, it's OK to quit – you don't owe anybody free work.

STREET FIGHTER IV
CAPCOM

ARCADE HEROES USED TO LOOK SO PLAIN! IT'S STILL GOING STRONG TODAY, UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE OF EDITOR ADAM PRATT.

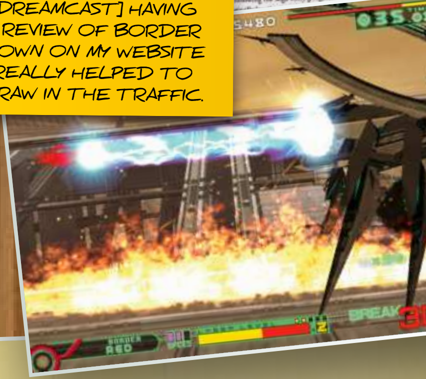


ARCADE HEROES

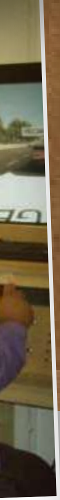
THE SAVIOURS OF COIN-OP

Sega Rally 3: Hands on impressions

[DREAMCAST] HAVING A REVIEW OF BORDER DOWN ON MY WEBSITE REALLY HELPED TO DRAW IN THE TRAFFIC.



I DID A BEHIND-THE-SCENES REPORT ON SEGA'S ARCADE VERSION OF GRID BACK IN 2010, AND SAW THESE AWESOME TESTING BENCHES.



SEGA
amusements europe

IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO GET NEAR STREET FIGHTER IV AT ATEI 2009, SUCH WAS THE HYPE – I HAD TO POKE MY CAMERA THROUGH THE CROWD AND HOPE.

I HAD A PICTURE TAKEN AT THE SEGA RALLY 3 LAUNCH, JUST IN CASE I NEVER GOT AN OPPORTUNITY LIKE THAT AGAIN.

IMPACT!
A tumblr about video games
Destroy the car!

I ALWAYS LIKED SINGLE-WORD MAGAZINE TITLES LIKE EDGE AND MAXIMUM, SO I CHOSE IMPACT! AS THE NAME OF MY RETRO BLOG.

PAC-MAN BATTLE ROYALE
BANDAI NAMCO
Games

TRADE SHOWS WERE A HIGHLIGHT OF EVERY JANUARY, EVEN THOUGH I FELT OUT OF PLACE AMONG THE SUIT-WEARING PROFESSIONALS.

SUMMER OF SONIC
SEGA

SINCE JOINING RETRO GAMER, I'VE INTERVIEWED MANY INTERVIEWEES FROM MY FAN-SITE DAYS – MOST FREQUENTLY TAKASHI IIZUKA.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE FANZINES AND FAN SITES?

Readers share their favourite fan-generated content

Devon Lord-Moncrief
I LOVED castlevaniadungeon.net back in the day. That was where I learned everything I could about my favourite series. A veritable treasure trove of info, history, and love. Just checked and they're still up! Definitely have to give them support.

Forgotten Worlds
UK Resistance was massively influential. Sega blue skies forever. Oh, and I interviewed Gary Cutlack recently.

Snoogans
SMS Power! These guys' achievement to archive so much Master System/Game Gear memorabilia is really quite something.

Daniel Betts
Can't say enough good things about DK Vine/The Kongversation and their work in the field of *Donkey Kong* investigative journalism and Rare coverage.

Ashley Day
Shining Force Central! I completed *Shining Force III*, my favourite game of all time, in 1998 then went online the same day and found this site which told me there were two more Japan-only chapters available to play!

Anthony Bull
Home Of The Underdogs. I love how they focus on bringing the spotlight on games that were good but had dismal sales or negative reviews.

SONIC RETRO
SOS 2013 – TAKASHI IIZUKA INTERVIEW

SONIC RETRO MAINLY DOCUMENTS THE HISTORY AND TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF SEGA'S FLAGSHIP SERIES.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

OLD!
The NES BOOK

PSP COVER STAR

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Please would you consider putting the PSP on the cover. It's a fantastic handheld that never gets the love it deserves. There are some amazing games you could lead with, but I think an image of the machine itself is the way to go. If you can include one with an image of *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite* I'll be even happier.
Many thanks,
Jacob Benson

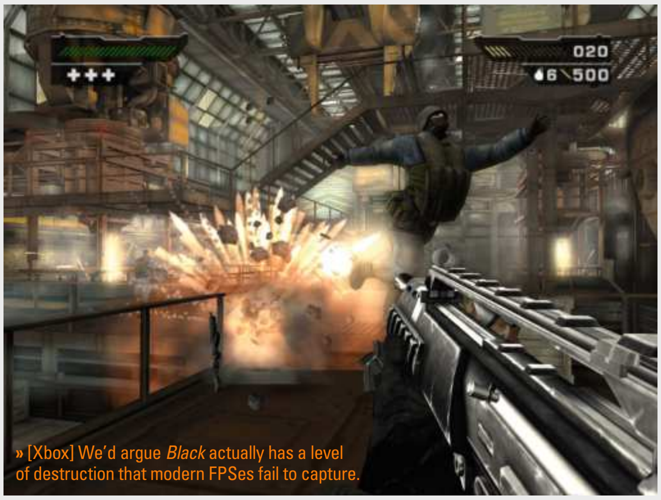
We agree that the PSP is worthy of the cover Jacob, but we'd most likely look at covering Nintendo's DS first, as it's the best-selling handheld of all time. We'll think about it for 2023 when the system will be 19 years old.

STAR LETTER

RINSE, LATHER, REPEAT

Hey **Retro Gamer**,
After the initial excitement of focussing my collecting on more affordable platforms such as the Xbox, I can't help feeling I'm missing something here. I feel many Xbox games aren't that different from modern games. There is little reason to play, say *Forza Motorsports* over *Forza Horizon 5* or *Black* over any of the FPS shooters available today. Most of the Xbox games that I'm excited about are cancelled Dreamcast games, echoes from the golden age of gaming that in my opinion ended with the Dreamcast. I feel mainstream gaming found its footing during the Xbox/PS2 era and since then has repeated itself through each generation with more advanced graphics. With new generations entering the domain of retro, does it ever feel like you're giving coverage to 'older versions of modern games'?
All the best,
Patrik Prusak

Thanks for writing in, Patrik. Xbox games definitely feel out of place mechanically compared to newer releases, but there's still plenty we think are excellent, including *Black*. We've featured *Gears Of War* in the latest issue and that's still worth playing today, despite its age. Have a book for your interesting letter.



» [Xbox] We'd argue *Black* actually has a level of destruction that modern FPSes fail to capture.

IT TAKES TWO

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'd like to thank Iain Lee for sharing his co-op gaming exploits with *It Takes Two* alongside his kids. On the back of his recommendation, I bought the game and have been playing it recently with my two boys. We have never had so much fun together! But why is it that local multiplayer is so overlooked by developers nowadays? In my view, this is an oversight as you can't beat playing against someone in the same room. I see from Load 239 that Iain is now playing *Fall Guys* with his children. Guess I'll be playing this one soon as well! Top mag, keep up the great work,
Jason Avards

We passed your kind words on to Iain, Jason. Local multiplayer gaming does seem to be getting ignored by the bigger developers. Maybe it's a cost thing. Maybe we need to revisit our multiplayer games feature from a few years back.

CAPCOM
Leon
Mega Potion

» [PSP] Do you want to see *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite* on the cover? Jacob certainly does.

FORGOTTEN 8-BITS

Dear Darran,
How is this for an article idea? I've finally got my hands on a working, good condition SAM Coupé. I've been chasing one down for years and successfully got it to Australia. It's a cracking machine and a niche in terms of its place in history. As I scan my cave, I see many forgotten 8-bits. The Newbrain, Camputers Lynx, Oric, Enterprise 128K to name a few. Given ownership was rare of these machines, you would never justify a spotlight on just one but how about an article on many of them? You could track down original owners and get their recollections. It would be a nice way to pay homage to these forgotten cousins of the Big 3! Alright – time to fire up the SAM for a weird version of *Manic Miner*. I don't think there's a version of *Strider* on here!
Take care,
Matt Dickerson

» [Switch] We've not played it ourselves, but we've heard good things about *It Takes Two*.

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retro GAMER
50 YEARS ATARI

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Somerset, BA1 1UA

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» Systems like the Oric-1 don't get covered much in the mag. What obscure machine would you like to see featured?

We're glad you finally got your hands on a SAM Coupé, Matt. That's a great idea for an article as well. Leave it with us and we'll see what we can do.

FILLING THE VOID

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I want to applaud Darran Jones' column, Consumed By Collecting. Many of his points about wanting to fill a personal void by collecting videogames, (perhaps trying to connect with happier times) rang incredibly true with my own gaming experience. But far more importantly, Darran's discussion about his personal battle with depression was so refreshing and so important. As more people open up and talk about their struggles with it, others that fight that cloud of anxiety and sadness, such as myself, know we're not alone. We are together with others, in dealing with one of the more difficult aspects of the human experience. Thank you again, Darran.

Jeremiah Brewer

Again, we've been overwhelmed by the response for Darran's article in issue 237. We're glad it connected with so many readers.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Mega Drive Mini 2

Sega's latest system has really impressed us and Nick and Darran have been discussing it a lot. In fact, they've both been so impressed with the selection of games and the quality of the emulation that Darran regrets that his has been put aside for Christmas. He did manage to convince Melanie that he should open it, just to "make sure that it worked". He got away with it as well.

53 classic games + 7 bonus titles!
SEGA
SEGA Mega Drive Mini 2
MEGA DRIVE
II
12
16

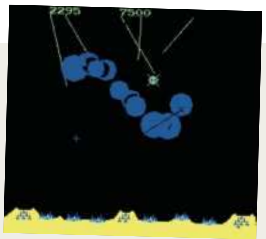
» Having lots of games is great, but don't let your collection consume you.

retro GAMER

Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Atari game?



» [Arcade] Atari's *Missile Command* left a big impression on Greg Fisher.

Clint Elwyn Thomas
Gauntlet II: the first videogame I ever played.

KnicksRIP
Tempest 2000. It took a truly great game and elevated it to god-tier. It was also the one Jaguar game that every magazine seemed to agree was a standout.

Ryan Pascall
Desert Falcon! I had not seen anything like it, with 3D environments, collectible icons and great music, it was absolutely breathtaking!

Stupots
Paperboy – from the moment I saw the handlebar controls in an arcade I was hooked. Then the home port on my Spectrum was played to death trying to break windows of the non-subscribers!

Greg Fisher
Missile Command. The big orange trackball, the growing tension as more missiles fill the screen and then THE END… superb.

Pedro G.
Crystal Castles: I will always remember those stages and the secrets that were hidden in each one of them. Besides, it was pretty challenging.

Rothenberger Paul
You do like to pose difficult questions. So many across so many platforms, but my go-to would have to be *Gauntlet*. Warrior shot the food!

Matt Pilz
Cosmic Ark is the first memory I have of playing any videogame, and it remains my most-played game on the 2600.

ballistikcoffeeboy
Pac-Man for the 2600. Because I stood in line with dad to get this game on release day and it was a whopping $40!

Jet Set Willy Nilly
Centipede. I never got very good at it but it didn't stop me pumping 10p pieces into the machine in the local chippy. Just so much frantic fun.

Grail
Marble Madness. Wonderfully original and imaginative. Visceral gameplay (with the trackball) and the music was suitably abstract.

robert annett
Asteroids. A 1979 game with superb gameplay that is still playable today.

Robin
River Raid. Perfect in every way and still a superbly balanced shoot-'em-up.

retro GAMER

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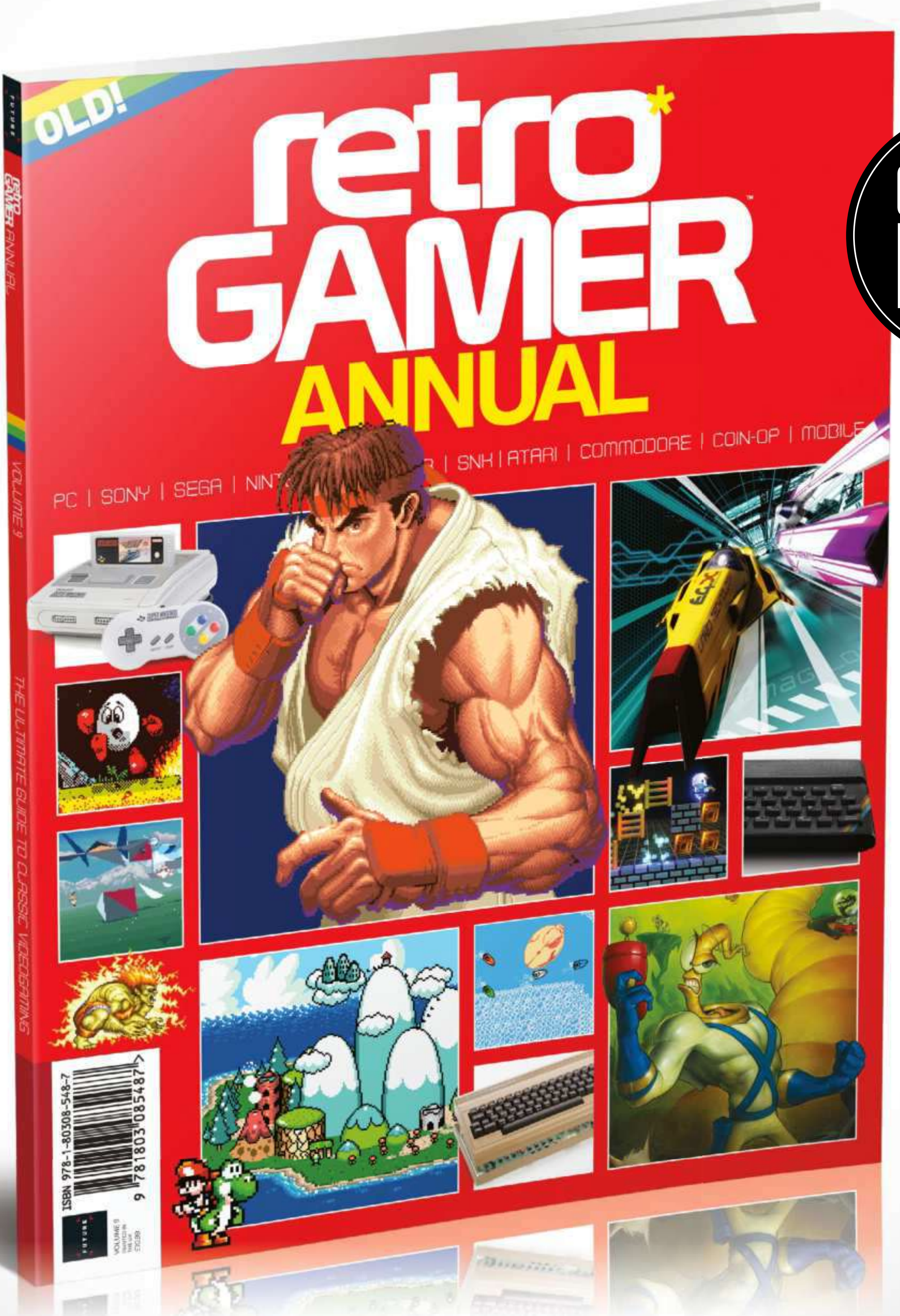

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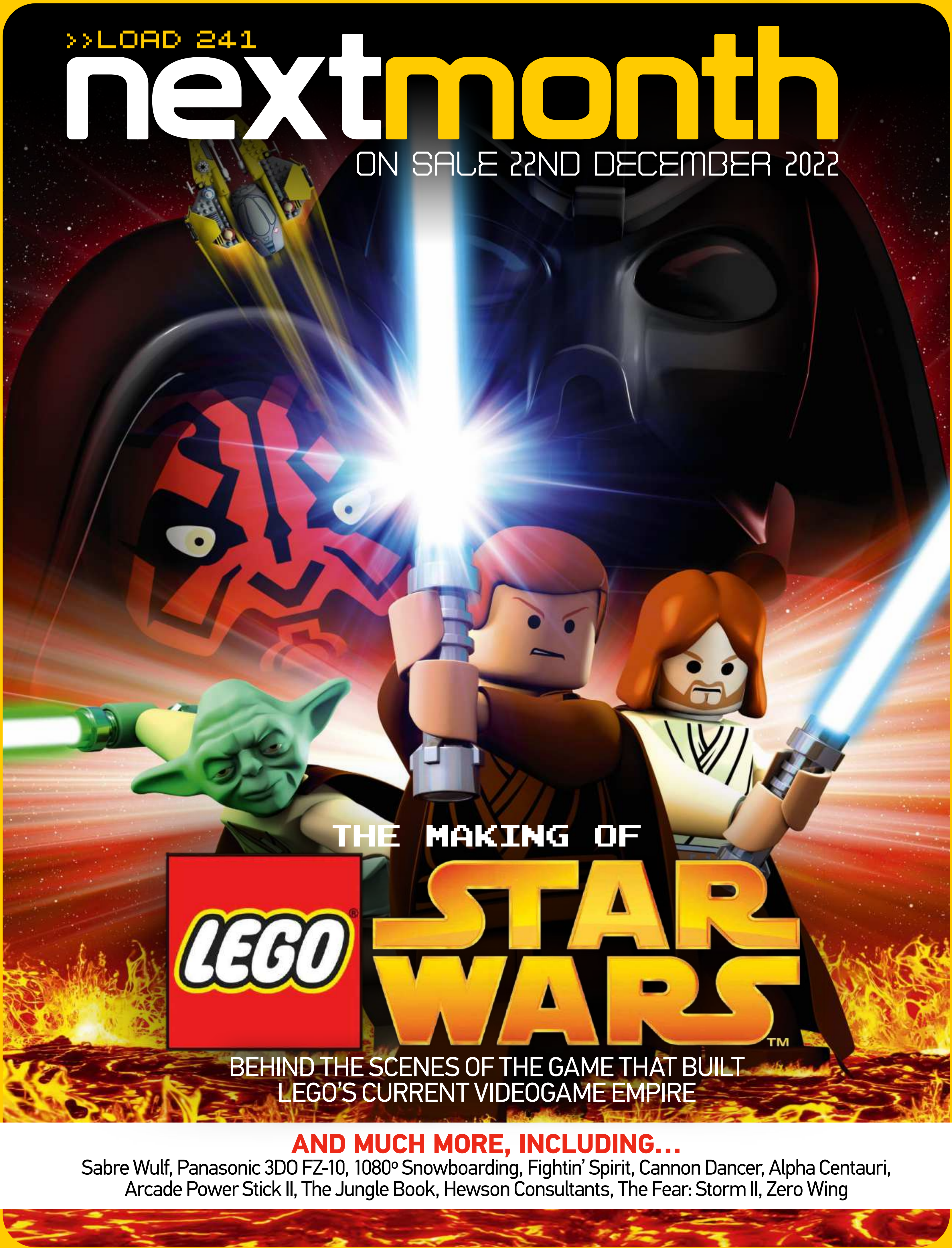

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» RETROREVIVAL

Gears Of War

“ALL AROUND ME ARE FAMILIAR FACES...”

» XBOX 360 » 2006 » EPIC GAMES

It’s not often that you go to the cinema and see a trailer that makes as big an impression as the film you’ve paid to see, but I’ll never forget going to watch *Casino Royale* and seeing the *Gears Of War* trailer for the first time. The choice to accompany those scenes with Gary Jules’ cover of *Mad World* was extraordinarily effective because action games just weren’t marketed like that, and even my mum was paying attention.

It seems funny now because as bold a choice as that was, *Gears Of War* is the stereotypical game of its era – a cover shooter with a desaturated colour palette, starring hulking space marines. But in that regard it’s a victim of its own success, as it wouldn’t have been so widely imitated if it hadn’t been such a hit, and it deserved to sell as well as it did. It was one of the first games to really show off what the Xbox 360 could offer graphically, and was far ahead of most of the competition on the system. The cover mechanics were effective and easy to grasp, with level designs that allowed you to choose how you approached certain situations.

To be honest though, I can’t help but think that much of the appeal of *Gears Of War* lies in the Lancer. *It’s a gun with a chainsaw on it.* In a game that already feels like Epic somehow managed to distil programming code from pure testosterone, it’s the cherry on top – a masterpiece of over-the-top weapon design. Bored of puncturing Locust heads from a distance? No problem, just stroll up to an enemy and before the nearest self-appointed moral guardian can shout “ban this sick filth” you’ll have torn through them in a shower of gore. It’s not subtle. It doesn’t have to be. *Gears Of War* is pure macho power fantasy, and it’s all the better for being unabashedly so. ✱

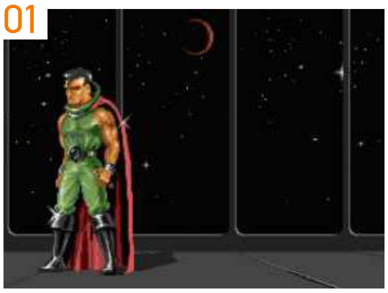
ENDGAME

SUPREMACY: YOUR WILL BE DONE

SUPREMACY
YOUR WILL BE DONE
ATARI ST

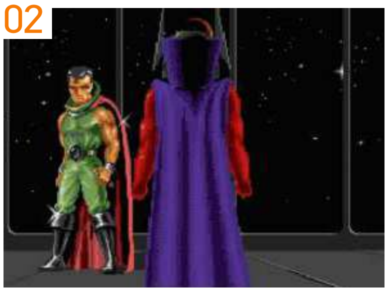
» Our North American friends will know this game as Overlord, and being an overlord isn't easy. Directing military operations, disciplining minions, taking care of your Mega Drive emporium – it's a tough life. But what happens when you do away with all pretenders and become the ultimate overlord? Let's skip to the end and find out.

01



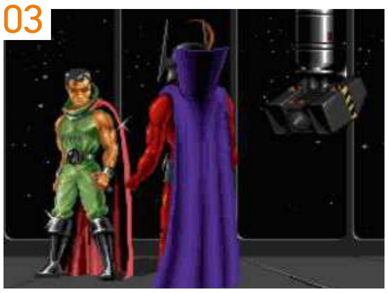
» You have entered this year's Intergalactic Overlords Conference, a highlight of every space dictator's year since it was founded in 2824. Your boots are shined to perfection and your cape is looking magnificent.

02



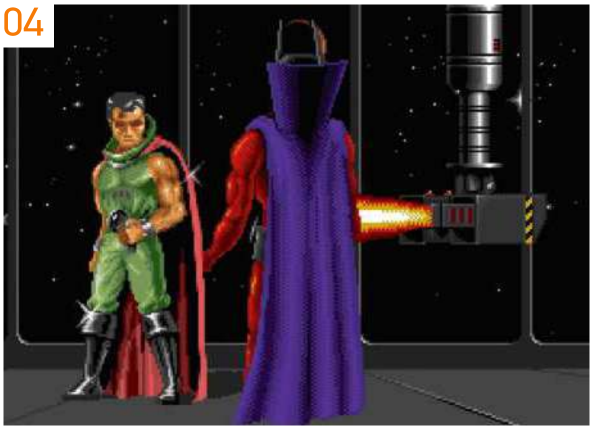
» There's always one person you dread seeing at events like these, and here's Natol's Emperor Colin IV, who asks, "Hey, how's the wife?" He does this knowing full well she was a resistance spy you had to execute.

03



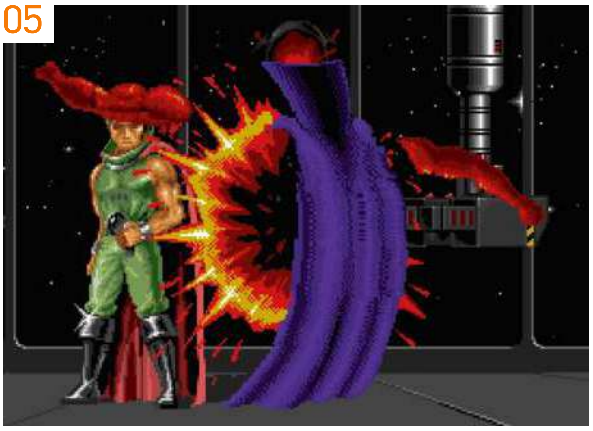
» Fortunately, this year happens to be your turn hosting, and you have a plan. "Hey Colin, how about a selfie?" He agrees, but wisely chooses to keep his distance, bearing the old 'knife-in-the-back' trick in mind.

04



» Poor old Colin didn't account for all the tricks though, and he's fallen for the oldest one in the book – the 'laser-blaster-disguised-as-a-camera' ruse. "That's what you get for the wife jibe," you gloat. "And for wearing such a preposterous collar."

05



» Word of Colin's demise spreads almost as quickly as his body parts spread over your reception area. Now all his base are belong to you, and you've ensured the permanent camera-shyness of everyone who dares call themselves an overlord.

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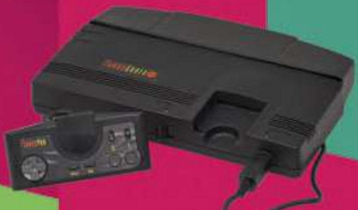

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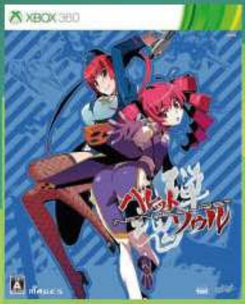

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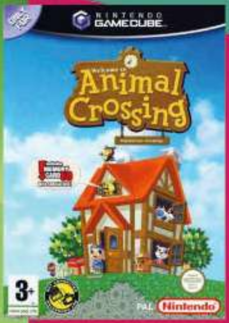
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